

First the legal stuff. I don't own any of the Harry Potter characters, plot, etc, (J.K. Rowling does) but I wish I did. This is not an infringement on her copyrights, it is just intended for my enjoyment and the enjoyment of others. If you decide to sue, then you can have all my Bills. That's about all I've got.

Yes this is another Harry Potter in Azkaban story. I want to thank Medabart, Quillian, Sheyda, and Krtshadow, among others for the inspiration for this. I also blame them, because once this idea popped into my head it wouldn't leave me alone. This is not intended to be a Superpower Harry story, just a very powerful Harry. How much he is able to do will depend on the magic available in the area he is in. If you want a comparison for what he is able to do, I compare his power level and ability to that of the magic users in the Belgarion saga by David Eddings.

Yes the Title has changed from "So What". I think this is a much better title for this story. Also since a number of people complained when I posted Wizard of Silence in its entirety when it was completed, saying they wanted it as chapters separated by time, even though this story is complete, it will be posted at the rate of about 1 chapter a week. I hope you enjoy it.

Do Not Meddle In The Affairs Of Wizards
by Corwalch

Now You're Sorry!
Azkaban, July 16, 1997

They're coming. Harry climbed up on the stone slab that served as his bed and peered out the small barred window. The sun was just beginning to set and Harry knew without a doubt that shortly after it had set, two groups would be invading Azkaban. Voldemort's, who would no doubt try to recruit him, once he realised just how powerful Harry had become and would continue to become. And Dumbledore's who undoubtedly try to kill him

As he sat back down, Harry couldn't help wondering which of his enemies would reach him first the Order or the Death Eaters.

If he hadn't lost track of too many days, courtesy of the Dementors, then Harry estimated that he'd been here about ten months. Back when he'd started his sixth year, Harry wouldn't have thought his life, could get much worse after Sirius' death and then finding out that because of a prophecy that Trelawney made that he either had to kill Voldemort, or be killed by him, but it turned out he was wrong. It could get worse and had.

Barely two weeks into his sixth year, Harry had had his wand snapped by Dumbledore, expelling him from Hogwarts, then he had been arrested and subjected to a farce of a trial, accused of killing Neville Longbottom and being in league with Voldemort. Where all his former friends had gleefully stood up and given evidence about what an evil dark wizard he was. No one had listened to his protestations of innocence.

What few I was allowed to make, before they hit me with a silencing charm, Harry reflected wryly.

He shook his head again over the idiocy of the people who made up the wizarding world, including supposedly intelligent people like Dumbledore and Granger.

Dumbledore knew what the prophecy said. He was the one who'd heard the damn thing in the first place. How could he possibly believe that locking the one destined to defeat Voldemort up was a good idea? More importantly, how could that old fool possibly believe the tripe that Fudge was spouting about how he'd joined Voldemort and that he'd murdered Neville as proof of his loyalty.

Granger had done the unforgivable as far as he was concerned, along with her partner-in-crime. And thanks to the Dementors, that particular memory was etched in his mind forever.

As Fudge, Percy, and the group of Aurors were dragging him out of Hogwarts, they encountered the Gryffindor students who had apparently decided to give him a little send off. His housemates led by Granger and the Weasel, were waiting out on the lawn in front of the main entrance, with the heads of the four houses off to one side, and all his things piled up in front of them. As soon as his fellow

Gryffindors had caught sight of him, they began hurling foul epithets at him.

Fudge had seemed quite pleased by their reaction to his supposed disgrace and had been more than willing to stand there while they verbally ripped Harry to shreds. Ron and Hermione had something more planned though. As one they raised their wands and shouted, "Incendious!"

His belongings burst into flame. Struggling against the iron grip of the two Aurors holding him, Harry wanted to try and save at least his Firebolt, the only remaining gift he had from his godfather, but he couldn't get free. As his things continued to burn and the Gryffindors to cheer at the sight, Harry saw Hermione was holding something else up. His photo album! She had waited until he saw her holding it before casting it into the flames.

Harry fought even harder trying to get free, but it was futile. Tears ran down his face, as he was forced to watch the only images he'd ever had of his parents burned to cinders.

The heads of House made no attempt to stop the impromptu bonfire. They just stood there and watched his things burn.

That was the last time he had cried. Even now, the thought that his friends and the members of the Order hadn't bothered to get his side of the story, made him angry rather than sad. They were all so quick to rush to judgement. It was apparently easier to believe Fudge's atrocious claims than to bother to think things out themselves. At first, he couldn't understand how Weasel and Granger could believe it though. Spending all the time they had with him, how could they really believe that he would dishonour his parents' and Sirius' memories by joining the person responsible for their deaths. These days he didn't care about their reasons. Every time he'd had to relive that particular memory for the pleasure of the Dementors, Harry vowed to make Granger, the Weasel, and everyone else pay for what they'd done.

Leaning back against the wall, Harry thought over the last few months. They had certainly been an eye-opener. In an attempt at self-

preservation, his magic had begun working in a way Harry had never heard of before. He was now largely unaffected by the Dementors. They only made him mildly uncomfortable these days. He could also now feel the magic currents flowing about him. Apparently the “power the Dark Lord Knows not” was the ability to manipulate magic with his mind and will alone. What he wanted to occur would, if there was enough magic around to make it happen.

He couldn't wait until Dumbledork and Moldyshorts got here, so he could show them both just how much he'd learned in a place where magic was supposed to be impossible to do.

Hearing footsteps coming up the passageway, Harry resumed, his vacant, idiot look, so the guard or whoever was coming wouldn't get suspicious.

Earlier that same day
#12 Grimmauld Place

Dumbledore looked at the assembled members of the Order, including the two most junior members, Ron and Hermione, who were there in spite of Ms. Weasley's protests. “My sources tell me that Voldemort intends to attack Azkaban tonight, to free the Deatheaters imprisoned there...”

“Potter!” Ron spat. “He's going to release that filthy traitor!”

“I understand that is his intention among other things.” Dumbledore told the assembled group. “It will be one of our objectives tonight, along with fifty ministry Aurors, to stop them and capture as many Deatheaters as possible. Our main objective is going to be to prevent Voldemort from getting his hands on Potter.”

“Even if we must kill him?” Moody wanted to know.

Dumbledore's mind wandered back for a moment to the first time he'd seen the wide-eyed innocent Harry Potter enter the Great Hall over six years ago. Then his mind just as quickly jumped to the scene of he and Fudge bursting into a third floor room to find Potter standing over the body of Neville Longbottom, wand in hand.

He and Fudge had been discussing the progress that had been made in readying the wizarding community to defend itself against Voldemort, when Percy Weasley had burst into his office, looking pale. In panting breaths, the Minister's assistant had told them he just heard someone use the Killing Curse in the third floor corridor on the right side and what sounded like a body hitting the floor.

It had certainly been a good thing that young Percy had been wandering around the castle that day, reliving old memories and heard Harry cast the Killing Curse, otherwise the boy might have made good his escape.

Dumbledore had stood there staring, wanting to deny the evidence of his eyes, but he couldn't. Harry was there, standing over the body of the only other possible person who fit the prophecy. And when Priori Incantato had been done, it showed the last spell cast by his wand had been the Killing Curse.

Fudge, who was very prone to leaping to the conclusions he wanted to believe, had none-the-less, in this instance been right. Harry Potter had killed Neville Longbottom. How could he have been so wrong not to see this coming? Neville's death had to be in repayment for the Dark Lord's killing of Bellatrix Lestrange, a few weeks into the summer. The woman's mutilated corpse had been found near Little Whinging in Surrey a few weeks after the term had ended.

When he'd originally heard about her death, Dumbledore had thought it was Voldemort's punishment for her failure to get the prophecy, but now he was certain he knew why she had been killed. Voldemort had given Harry the revenge he wanted on Bellatrix for killing his godfather, in order to gain his loyalty.

The Headmaster hadn't wanted to believe that he had misjudged Potter that badly, but it was clear that he had. His attempts to mould Potter into the person he needed him to be to kill Voldemort had failed. Young Potter apparently hated him enough, for leaving him with the Dursleys, keeping secrets from him, and by his silence during Harry's fifth year, indirectly being the cause of his godfather's death, to join the person who had killed his parents in order to have his revenge.

“Dumbledore?” Moody’s voice interrupted his thoughts. “Do we kill Potter, if necessary?”

Dumbledore looked sad as he nodded. “If it is the only way to keep him from rejoining the Dark Lord, then yes, kill him.”

Azkaban, the main hall

Dumbledore, the Weasleys, Hermione, and about half a dozen Aurors were all that remained of the force that had gone to Azkaban to try and stop Voldemort. They had been herded into the largest wardroom, where Voldemort and his Death eaters waited. There were a few Death eaters still out in the prison who along with the Dementors who had remained at Azkaban, were looking for Potter.

“We found him, master.” A voice announced as two Death eaters brought the unresisting young man into the room.

“Excellent!” Voldemort glided over to the unmoving boy, looking pleased. “Where did you find him?”

“Up on one of the turret walkways, just standing there in the wind.”

Voldemort put a finger under Harry’s chin and raised his head up from where it was looking at the ground. Dumbledore could see the lifeless eyes and the dull, uncaring expression on Potter’s face and felt satisfied that at least this Death eater would be of no use to Voldemort.

“Oh, how the mighty have fallen,” Voldemort cackled. “And his condition is solely due to those on his own side.”

“That’s a lie!” Ron shouted. “Why are you pretending? We all know he joined you. He killed Neville Longbottom for you.”

Voldemort pointed his wand at the gangly red head and almost lazily said, “Crucio.”

Ron tried to resist screaming, not wanting to give him the satisfaction, but he quickly let out a shriek.

“Don’t contradict me again, boy,” the Dark Lord warned. “Potter never joined my minions, though we did want you to think that. Potter killed no one. He doesn’t have it in him to kill, especially not a friend.”

There was a pause as the remaining Order members and Aurors realised what Voldemort meant by his statements.

Their faces took on a look of a guilt as Voldemort added. “I had to remove the problem and you, Dumbledore and the Ministry very obligingly helped me. Thanks to you, your saviour is now a mindless idiot. One would have thought you learned your lesson after the first time, Dumbledore but you still view people as chess pieces to be discarded when they are no longer of any use or they no longer obey your orders. Locking up not one but two people in Azkaban who were innocent based on false evidence. If my sources are correct, Black managed to last here for twelve years, with at least some of his sanity intact. But the second, his godson and the wizarding world’s only chance of defeating me didn’t even last a year.”

While Voldemort was gloating like some bad guy out of a muggle movie, Harry’s eyes carefully noted the positions of the Death Eaters in the room and felt out the presence of the ones in the halls of the prison. He blinked his eyes once and all the Death Eaters in the room collapsed as if someone had thrown a switch shutting them off.

Voldemort fell silent, looking for the source of the attack then he started demanding, “Who did that? All Death Eaters to me!”

After enclosing Voldemort’s body in an unseen, unfelt mental web, so that his soul could not escape again, Harry said in a very rusty voice, “I’m afraid they won’t be able to answer you, Tommy boy.”

Angry, Voldemort’s attention returned to the Boy-Who-Lived and saw the eyes that had been empty, were now filled with emerald fire, though his face was still an expressionless mask. “So you are not quite as mad as you led the guards and everyone else to believe. Good I much prefer a challenge. It is a pity you won’t join me, we could be great together, but having dealt with you a few times before,

I know that you and I will always be enemies. Therefore you must be eliminated."

"I wouldn't be too sure of who is going to be the victor, if I were you." Harry countered, his gaze never wavering from the snake like face. "You see I have found that I can kill if given sufficient reason, and you, Tommy boy, have given me plenty of reason."

"Don't call me that!" Voldemort hissed, pointing his wand at the young man.

"Why not, it's your name, though not for very much longer." Harry continued, looking unconcerned by the fact that a wand, belonging to an extremely dangerous wizard was pointed at him, by said wizard. "As the phoenix is consumed so shall you be, only unlike the phoenix, you will not be reborn."

As the Order watched uncomprehendingly, deep green fire burst out of Voldemort's eyes and mouth. The body was quickly engulfed in the green flames and reduced to ash, like a phoenix on burning day.

Harry sighed, relieved that Voldemort was no more. He was free. His parents were finally avenged.

"Harry," Ron spoke cautiously to the unmoving figure in the middle of the room, trying to think of something to say that would help him recover their former friendship.

The dark shaggy head turned in his direction, and the expression on his face was anything but pleasant. "Do not ever speak to me again! You and Granger lost that right the day I was arrested. This is the only warning you will receive."

Dumbledore took a step toward the young man in the middle of the room, only to be halted by the glare from the emerald eyes that were peeking out from under the long shaggy bangs.

Harry pushed some of the hair out of his eyes and the Headmaster saw for the first time the streaks of white running through it. "Don't you say a word either, old man. I want nothing from you," Harry's

raspy voice sounded very menacing. "As soon as I have my freedom, I am leaving your damned hypocritical world."

Dumbledore started to assure him that there would be a meeting of the full Wizengamot and he would be freed by tomorrow evening, but Harry made a sudden gesture as if throwing something at the floor near the pile of ash that used to be Voldemort.

Fudge appeared in the spot Harry had gestured at, wearing a pin-striped nightshirt and a cap with a little pompom on the end of it. His foot was raised as if he'd been taking a step up when he was brought there. A couple of the order members sniggered at the sight, despite the seriousness of the situation.

"Hello Minister Fudge," Harry greeted the man. "Welcome to my little party. Over here, we have the remaining members of the Order and your few surviving Aurors. Scattered around the floor, and through out the passageways of Azkaban, we have the Deatheaters."

The portly little man blanched when he realised who was talking to him and where he was and shouted, "Guards!"

While the threads of magic that bound them to serving the Ministry, were tenuous at best these days, as long as they hadn't been completely broken, those threads would force the Dementors to answer his call.

A feeling of cold and despair began to fill the wardroom and Fudge looked at Potter eagerly, waiting to see the young man faint. He had heard all about the extreme reaction Potter had to Dementors but the boy was standing there looking unconcerned. As soon as the first Dementor reached the doorway, a bright silver orb appeared and raced to engulf it. When it shrank back down the Dementor was no longer there and the orb went out of the room. The people in the room, who were still conscious, saw the silver light flare brightly then shrink and flare then shrink again.

"You shouldn't have done that Minister." Harry's raspy voice chided the terrified man. "By the time my little orb has finished its work, there won't be a Dementor left in Azkaban."

"H-h-h-ow d-d-did y-y-y-you b-b-b-bring me here?" The Minister stuttered.

"I wanted you here." Harry told him simply. "I just wanted to talk to you and have you actually listen, without any of your toadying sycophants around."

"There is nothing you have to say, that I want to hear, Deatheater!" Fudge stated firmly, ignoring for the moment that a very powerful wizard had done the seemingly impossible and apparated him from his bedroom to Azkaban.

"Don't take that tone with me Minister." Harry countered just as firmly. "That pile of ash, you are standing next to, as those awake in this room can attest to, is the former Dark Lord Voldemort. And you could be next, if you don't watch it. After all, at this point, I have nothing to lose."

Fudge looked down and jumped back as he caught sight of the huge pile of ash on the floor. He collided with Dumbledore who had moved closer to try and help smooth things over. It was quite clear that whatever power Trelawney had said Harry would have, he had tapped into and the last thing the ancient wizard wanted to happen was for Harry to reduce the Minister to a pile of ash in a fit of anger. That wouldn't get the boy his freedom.

Realising who he'd backed into, Fudge turned to face the Headmaster and demanded, "What's going on here, Dumbledore?"

"He's not the one you need to ask Minister. I am." Harry told him.

"Then why am I here?" Fudge looked at Potter, unable to read anything from the expression on his face. "Do you intend to kill me too?"

"If I wanted you dead, I wouldn't have had to bring you here to do it." Harry told him. "You are here to correct at least two of the mistakes you've made, during your tenure as Minister."

“What mistakes?” Fudge blustered, “I’ve made no mistakes.”

“What about denying the return of Voldemort, until he got in your face.” Harry reminded the man. “You gave him free reign for a year before you admitted he was back. How many deaths can be laid at your feet because of that delay? How many muggle-born and muggles died because of your inaction? You’ve made a lot of mistakes and now you have the chance to correct a few of them.”

“Since you were the one who brought up Death eaters, let’s clear the air somewhat.” Harry gestured and a tall slender Death eater rose from the floor and hung a few inches off the floor as if held up by a levitation spell. “You really should start choosing your friends, sycophants, and assistants more carefully, Minister. You trusted Lucius Malfoy, even though he is a confirmed Death eater. You ignored the fact that I told you he’d rejoined Voldemort after the Tri-Wizard Tournament, simply because he gave you money. I think he’s over there, near Snape.” Harry gestured toward the group of Death eaters, lying on the floor behind the Minister, before raising a finger as if to say ‘that’s one’.

“Next we come to Dolores Umbridge, during my fifth year. A power mad woman who was under the delusion that she could do whatever she wanted and there would be no consequences, simply because she was doing your work, which was to keep me and everyone else silent about Voldemort’s return. Not only did she terrorise and torture the student body of Hogwarts for an entire year, but she set two Dementors on me before school even started, in an attempt to get me expelled.” Harry raised a second finger, continuing to count off the Minister’s mistakes. “And last but by no means least, we come to your current assistant, who is not only a toadying sycophant, but moonlights as a Death eater.”

There were stunned gasps from the Weasleys, as they realised who he was referring to, then Arthur said, “My son wouldn’t do that! We may be having our problems, but Percy would never join the Dark Lord!”

“You think not,” Harry countered. “Your son on Voldemort’s orders framed me so I would be sent to Azkaban. He counted on your hatred

of me, Fudge, to grease the wheels of justice so that I wouldn't receive a fair trial. He's probably also the one who killed Neville, given that he was the only other person in the area at the time."

Harry gestured again, and the hooded robe and mask were stripped away, revealing an unconscious Percy Weasley. "Behold the arrogant 'I'm always right and you're wrong' Percy Weasley! Looks like Peter wasn't the only traitor to be sorted into Gryffindor, was he. Nor," he looked back at the remaining Weasleys, who were staring at their brother in shock, "is he the only Weasley to betray friends and family."

As Harry raised a third finger, Arthur sank to the floor in shock, staring at his son's lolling head. This is going to kill Molly.

Harry snapped his fingers. "Wakey, wakey."

The lolling head moved and the eyes opened. Percy upon feeling he was upright, but unable to feel anything solid under his feet, thrashed about for a moment, til he heard a raspy voice say, "Hello, Percy. Long time no see."

The voice sounded slightly familiar, "Potter."

"Yes, Percy. You don't mind if I call you Percy, do you? Not that it matters, given that I just irrevocably destroyed your master, Moldyshorts." Harry told him, drawing his attention to the pile of ash on the ground. "I should call you shit-for-brains because of the choices you've made."

Potter moved to stand between him and the pile of ash, effectively pulling his attention back to the eyes filled with emerald green fire. "You've been a very bad boy, Percy, and the Minister is here to hear just what you've been getting up to, in your spare time, so why don't you tell him all about how you framed me for killing Neville."

"I don't know what you're talking about." Percy tried to look anywhere but at Harry, however when he saw the disappointed looks on his family's faces, he decided he preferred looking at Potter. "I'm not a Deatheater. I was a spy for the Ministry in his ranks."

“Percy, Percy, Percy.” Harry just shook his head, looking disappointed. “I would have thought a career in politics would have taught you how to lie better. I got a real good look at Fudge’s face after your unmasking, and it’s quite clear that he knew nothing about your extracurricular activities. I know your kind. You, like Peter,” Harry looked over at the minister who was still standing where he’d appeared, as if rooted to the spot, “who you and I will be discussing in just a bit Minister, are toadying little wimps, who wouldn’t even sneeze, unless you were told to. Now start talking before I force the truth out of you in the most painful way possible.”

Percy felt relieved as he heard the protests made by the others in the room. They wouldn’t let this happen, no matter what they thought of him and his actions.

“Shut up!” Potter ordered, waving his hand in their direction and silence fell. “You lost any and all rights you may have had to tell me what to do when I was expelled from Hogwarts, and then condemned to Azkaban for a crime I didn’t do. I will have justice and it will be done my way.”

Harry’s attention returned to Percy, and with an evil grin on his face, he asked. “What’s it going to be Percy? Will we be having truth with or without pain? I know which I would prefer, but I’ll let you decide. You have five seconds to start talking, or you start hurting.”

Percy stared at Potter in disbelief as he counted off the time. The last thing he’d ever expected was that the Boy-Who-Lived could come across as more frightening than Mad Eye Moody and as scary as Voldemort.

Percy let out an unexpected shriek as he felt the little finger on his right hand suddenly break.

“Did you think I was kidding, or that I don’t have the stomach to torture you? Well, think again. I will have my freedom and if I have to take you apart piece by piece to get it, well, so be it.” Potter hissed, then moved closer and said in an even lower voice. “Thanks to you, I lost whatever scruples, I may have had about hurting someone. A

fact that your master found out as I burned him to a cinder from the inside out.” Potter stepped back and then spoke in a louder voice, “Every five seconds another bone will break, until you start talking and you had better make it the truth!”

“Harry!” Dumbledore called. “Don’t sink to their level. You are better than this!”

“A pity you didn’t realise that sooner, old man! Before you snapped my wand and then helped condemn me to hell!” Harry’s voice was dripping with scorn. “Anyway he has a way out. All he has to do is tell the truth. The spell I’ve cast will know if he lies and will break two bones for every lie. If he remains silent only one bone will be broken.”

Percy screamed in pain as a third finger was broken then he cried, “No more. Please, no more.”

“Start talking.” Harry ordered implacably.

Percy started talking, revealing the whole truth about the day Neville had died. He admitted to being the one who killed Neville Longbottom, after stunning Harry to get his wand, among other things.

Fudge stared at his assistant in horrified shock. How could he have made such a blunder? If word got out that his aide was a servant of Voldemort, and that he had been part of a conspiracy to get rid of the boy-who-lived, his career would be over. He was going to have to do some very fast damage control. He gestured to the Aurors and a couple of them came to take custody of Percy.

Once Percy had finished talking, Harry turned to look at Fudge. “Well, Minister?”

“Oh yes, of course, Mr. Potter.” the Minister stumbled trying to come up with the right words to placate a very powerful and currently very angry young wizard who was clearly capable of performing wandless and wordless magic. “I’ll have the papers clearing you of all charges drawn up once you return me to my office. As well as an official apology and compensation for your wrongful imprisonment.”

The Minister was rather surprised when the young man's face remained an expressionless mask. He should have looked pleased or relieved, or something. Not uncaring. Wasn't this what he wanted?

"You and I have one more matter to clear up before that happens, Minister." Potter told him.

"What?" Fudge looked baffled.

"There is the matter of my godfather's wrongful imprisonment." Potter told him.

"Black?" Fudge looked confused. "He wasn't wrongfully imprisoned."

"Just like I wasn't." Potter pointed out sarcastically. "Sirius Black wasn't even given a trial! He was just shoved into Azkaban and forgotten." The young man paused and took a deep breath. "He will be forgotten no longer though and the wizarding world will know the truth. Accio Peter Pettigrew."

An unconscious body skidded across the floor, causing the Minister to jump back in surprise. As the body arrived at Potter's feet, he gestured and the robe and mask were stripped away to reveal a small balding man with a rat like face and a silver hand. Another snap of his fingers and the man awoke.

"Minister, may I introduce you to the late Peter Pettigrew. As you can see he is no more dead than you are. I expect him to be questioned under veritaserum, the way my godfather and I were not." Potter knelt down beside the man who was cringing on the floor, and hissed. "Don't bother trying to transform, I have bound your animagus ability. I won't have you getting away again, Peter. Remember you owe me a life debt and I expect it to be repaid, by your telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

Looking back at Fudge, Harry warned him. "I expect to read an accurate story in the Daily Prophet tomorrow morning about how my godfather and I have been cleared. No politics. No editorialising. No attempts on your part to make points with the public or make yourself look good, just to keep your job. If I do not see those articles, or you

have done anything to try and make yourself look lily-white in all this, then Minister, your job will not last beyond the week, because I can assure you that I will be giving an interview of my own that Rita Skeeter would give her eye teeth for.”

“It will be there, tomorrow.” Fudge promised, well aware that if Potter made good on his threat, the wizarding public would probably use the Killing Curse on him, not just force him out of office.

Fudge barely had time to blink before he found himself in the Atrium of the Ministry of Magic, with Dumbledore and the remaining members of the Order and the Aurors who had gone with them. He looked around and found the Death eaters lying in a pile near the fountain of Magical Brethren, and they were beginning to stir, just as the intrusion alarm went off.

People seemed to come from everywhere, wands out. Shacklebolt took charge, and made arrangements for the Death eaters to be processed, except for Snape. Fudge looked around trying to find young Potter in all the chaos.

“Dumbledore!” Fudge called.

“Yes, Minister,” He responded, coming over to join Fudge.

“Where’s Potter?”

Dumbledore looked around in surprise. He couldn’t see any sign of the boy anywhere. “I don’t know, Minister. Perhaps you had better take care of those things, you promised him you would. I have a few things to take care of myself. It looks like it is going to be a long night.”

Mad Scramble

The Ministry, July 16, 1997, 11:00pm

Because of the sudden appearance of almost one hundred Deatheaters, the Minister in his nightclothes, and the Headmaster of Hogwarts among others, the Ministry was humming like a hive of startled bees.

Since the Ministry was in lockdown, due to the intruder alarm going off, none of the Deatheaters were able to apparate out. A few of the Deatheaters, who knew the layout of the Ministry, were quick to take advantage of the chaos in the main hall to try and disappear deeper into the Ministry building, hoping to escape later.

Shacklebolt and Moody, ignoring the Minister for the most part, set about trying to restore order.

The Minister seeing that they had things in hand, headed to his office to change into the spare set of robes he kept there for emergencies. He had heard the not very well-concealed sniggers at the sight of his nightshirt and wanted to regain some of his lost dignity. He also needed to arrange to get a reporter from every major wizarding paper here as soon as possible to tell them about Voldemort's demise, and that Harry Potter had been found innocent, as well as the news about Sirius Black being innocent, once they had the details from Pettigrew about what happened the night the Potters were killed by Voldemort. If he worded things right, he could fulfil Potter's conditions and still come out of this with his job intact.

Dumbledore seeing things were under control, as much as they could be with a hall full of Deatheaters, headed for one of the fireplaces. He needed to get the members of the Wizengamot here as soon as possible, if he were to have a chance of preventing Harry from disappearing. He wasn't going to have another angry young wizard disappearing, only to reappear as the newest Dark Lord. Harry's anger needed to be negated or at least turned outward so it could be dealt with and since he was partially responsible for the situation, it was up to him to try and fix it.

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Fudge, backed up by Arthur Weasley, who had actually been there, stood facing the crowd of reporters in the Atrium of the Ministry.

“Um hem,” Fudge cleared his throat and that silenced the reporters who were talking.

Looking at the pile of ash that Potter had transported to the ministry along with the people and one of the Aurors had placed in a sealed glass box, Fudge decided to get the most important, at least to the wizarding world, news out of the way first. “It is my great pleasure to announce that You-Know-Who has finally been defeated, once and for all.”

The noise level became almost deafening as all the reporters began firing questions at once. Fudge held up his hands signalling for quiet.

“One at a time, please,” he requested, then catching sight of a rather well-built blonde in a form fitting robe, he said, “You, Miss...,”

“Parton, from the Quibbler.” She identified herself. “How can we be sure that You-Know-Who is really gone? After all Minister, you did spend an entire year denying he’d come back.”

Fudge bristled slightly at the implication that he was lying, but before he could blast the witch, he remembered Potter’s warning about not trying to make himself look good. “That is why Arthur Weasley is here to confirm that the pile of ash in the container in front of me is that of the Dark Lord. He and Albus Dumbledore, who is currently in a meeting with the Wizengamot, were there when Harry Potter destroyed He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.”

“Harry Potter!” A number of the reporters chorused, then Magera from the Daily Prophet asked, “Why would Harry Potter destroy the Dark Lord? He joined him last summer or so we were told and he also killed Neville Longbottom on his orders.”

“Ah yes... well, we made a mistake there.” The Minister said quickly.

Before this could degenerate into an attempt by Fudge to save his job, Arthur quickly put in, "Voldemort, before Harry destroyed him, admitted that one of his Death Eaters framed Harry for killing Neville Longbottom."

"You said Potter destroyed You-Know-Who." Rhiat from the International Wizard Standard asked. "How did he reduce him to a pile of ash? I thought being in Azkaban prevented you from doing any magic."

"I have no idea why Harry was able to work magic and I have no idea what spell he used." Arthur told them. "I can only tell you the effects of it. I saw the dark green fire as it came out of his eyes and mouth. It engulfed the Dark Lord and reduced him to a pile of ash in seconds."

The reporters stared at the pile of ash with shock and a little fear. Their curiosity quickly overcame their fear and they began firing questions more rapidly.

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Wizengamot Chambers

"Albus, there should be no problem, enacting the statutes you need," Amelia Bones told him, "but are you sure this is the right way to handle this? From what little you've told me, Mr. Potter is currently a very angry young man and with good cause. Won't this just make him angrier?"

"I am aware of his anger, Amelia, and that is the reason, I want these edicts passed." Dumbledore told her. "Yes, Harry, in all likelihood will be angry, at first, but I am certain that he can be made to see reason. I made a mistake once of allowing a young wizard's anger to fester and grow, instead of trying to defuse it. My neglect allowed a promising young Wizard named Tom Riddle, to become Voldemort."

There was the expected flinch from the other members of the Wizengamot, and Dumbledore sighed. He would've thought that knowing the Dark Lord was finally and irrevocably dead would have given them the courage to say his name, but apparently the fear was too ingrained.

“The other reason, we need to passed these edicts, is because, whether he knows it or not, Mr. Potter, needs the Wizarding world as much as we need him.” Dumbledore said in conclusion. “We just need time to convince him of that.”

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Leaky Cauldron 12:01am July 17,1997

A very thin man with shaggy dark hair and ragged, shabby robes appeared in front of the Leaky Cauldron. If someone had been there to see his arrival, they would have shaken their heads, wondering if their eyes were playing tricks on them. Because where there had been a shabby, unkempt man, under the streetlight, was now standing a golden-haired man in neat robes.

The bell over the door that led into muggle London rang as the door struck it.

Tom looked up surprised. He hadn't expected anyone to be using that entrance this late at night.

The tall, well-built wizard walked up to the bar and asked in a low, husky voice. “Can I get a room for a few days?”

“Of course,” Tom pulled a key off a hook and handed it to him. “And your name, sir?”

“Edmund Cristo,” the man said as he headed for the stairs.

Tom noticed the man had no luggage, but before he could say anything, the man had disappeared.

(AN: 10 points to anyone who can figure out the source of the name Harry gave to Tom)

You Just Can't Resist Meddling, Can You?

Leaky Cauldron, 8am, July 17, 1997

Harry stood under the shower, scrubbing til he was almost raw. He wanted to clean the stench and filth of Azkaban from his body. It's a pity, he reflected, that it can't be cleaned as easily out of my mind.

Once his shower was finished Harry transfigured the worn and tattered clothes, he'd been wearing in Azkaban, to a pair of faded jeans and a non-descript t-shirt. Once his business at Gringotts was concluded, he intended to disappear into the non-magical world forever. He wasn't going to call it muggle any more, partly because he didn't want to attract attention by using that word and partly because it was a wizarding word. If he was lucky he would be able to finish his business with Gringotts today, but given his usual luck, he wasn't counting on it.

As soon as he was dressed, Harry recast the glamour he'd been wearing when he's come into the Leaky Cauldron last night. The face looking back at him from the mirror was a solemn one with grey eyes and it was surrounded by shoulder length, golden-brown hair. Best of all, at least in Harry's opinion, that damn scar couldn't be seen.

When he reached the bottom of the stairs that led into the taproom of the Leaky Cauldron, Harry found the place was almost overflowing with people who were laughing and drinking.

News of Voldemort's death must have reached them. Harry thought dryly as he did his best to avoid the grasps of several people who seemed intent in trying to drag him into their group and shove a drink in his hand.

Fighting his way through the crowd of people, Harry wound up near the bar, and wanting to get his suspicions confirmed, he shouted over the noise. "What's going on?"

"Haven't you heard?" Tom asked not looking up.

"No," Harry told him. "I've been in my room since I arrived last night."

Tom looked up to see which guest it was. "Oh, sorry, Mr. Cristo. They announced it last night. You-Know-Who is dead!"

"Who finally killed the bastard?" Harry inquired.

"Harry Potter!"

"You mean the boy who killed Neville Longbottom after he joined the Dark Lord, killed his master?" Harry sounded openly sceptical. "I thought he was in Azkaban. How could he kill the Dark Lord from there?"

"He was framed by a Deatheater," Tom told him, then handed over a copy of the Daily Prophet. "Here, read it for yourself."

The headline read: You-Know-Who Dead. FINALLY!!!! Harry Potter Revealed To Be Innocent Of Murder!

Harry just skimmed the article, wanting to make sure that Fudge had kept his side of the bargain. He noticed that Percy's name hadn't been mentioned. Instead the traitorous Weasley had been listed as simply the Deatheater responsible for framing Harry.

While he was annoyed at Fudge for not owning up to the fact that it was his assistant who framed him for murder, Harry was fairly certain it was at Arthur Weasley's request and not out of any desire to make himself look innocent. He was reasonably certain the foolish man didn't want his wife finding out her son was a Deatheater from the pages of the Daily Prophet. Personally he couldn't see why she shouldn't find out that way since she, like the rest of her traitorous family, had been so willing to believe him capable of murder and not even being willing to listen to his side of the story. Mrs. Weasley should feel the same pain she gave him, by not even listening to what he had to say. He had thought of the Weasleys as the family he had never had, until they all turned on him. How could they think him capable of murder? How could they think he would kill one of his friends?

Harry shook his head, trying to rid it of these thoughts. Dwelling on the past did him no good, especially now. He was here to start on the

path to his future. Folding up the paper, Harry pushed his way through the crowd to the empty courtyard in back. He stared at the bricks in the wall, mentally tapping the right bricks.

A moment later the archway into Diagon Alley appeared.

Harry stared at the crowded Alley in amazement. There had to be as many people here as had been at the World Cup in the summer before his fourth year. Sighing resignedly, Harry stepped through the archway and began pushing his way through the huge mass of people.

When he finally made it through the huge crowd, Harry was relieved to find the area around the steps and front door of Gringotts clear of any revellers. Grateful for that Harry nodded to the goblin that held the door open for him.

Inside it was fairly quiet but surprisingly enough there were several wizards in the bank conducting business. Not wanting to alert the wizards to his identity, Harry walked up to one of the goblins seated behind a desk and said, "I would like to speak with an account manager regarding my account."

"And which account might that be?" The goblin asked sounding disinterested.

Handing over a folded slip of paper, Harry said, "I would like this matter to remain confidential."

After taking a look at what was written on the paper the goblin gaped at him like a stunned shark. He quickly recovered and requested, "Give me a moment to fetch a manager."

He returned a few minutes later, accompanied by an elegantly dressed older goblin.

"If you'll follow me, sir." Harry was surprised by the slight hint of respect he could hear in the new goblin's voice.

The goblin led him to an impressive looking office.

Once the door was closed, the goblin gestured to the comfortable chair on the other side of the desk and requested, "Would please drop the glamour, Mr. Potter? I need to be certain of who I am speaking to."

Seeing no reason not to, Harry dropped the disguise.

The goblin gave a quick glance to the scar on his forehead before saying, "While I may not be the first, I want to thank you for ridding both our races of the Dark Lord."

"Actually you are the first," Harry couldn't resist commenting. Certainly no one who had been at Azkaban had thanked him. They had all been wallowing in their guilt and some of them, their stupidity.

This startled the goblin. Given the crowds outside, he would've thought someone in the wizarding world had thanked this brave young man. "Then again let me offer my heartfelt thanks."

Harry nodded.

Getting down to business, the goblin said, "My name is Ironknife Greeva. I am a branch manager for Gringotts. How may we assist you today, sir?"

Before Harry could say a word there was a knock on the door.

"Excuse me a moment, Mr. Potter." Greeva apologised. "Come."

"Sorry to disturb you, sirs," the goblin in the doorway apologised, "but Headmaster Albus Dumbledore wishes to speak with your client."

The goblins watched Harry's face take on a look of disgust as he commented, "I wonder how the old fool found me."

"Probably tracked you by your magical aura." Greeva told him. "It gives a more precise location than a point me spell. It's similar to what is used with the tracking clocks, but it requires Ministry or Wizengamot approval to use and you have to be a fairly powerful

wizard to work it. Those who are aware of the Ministry's ability to cast this spell are generally also the quickest to learn how to mask their aura."

"Which means it would be pointless to deny I am here." Harry ground out between clenched teeth.

"We can ask him to wait," the goblin by the door offered.

A smile appeared on Harry's face at the thought of the great Albus Dumbledore having to wait. "I would appreciate that."

At Greeva's nod of approval, the goblin left, closing the door behind him.

"I'd better get down to business," Harry told Greeva. "I don't think Dumbledore is going to wait out there too long before he comes barging in here."

"He is a wizard with a rather inflated sense of his own importance though he doesn't flaunt it much." Greeva observed. "We goblins have also noticed that he is very good at talking people into doing things. Even things they don't want to do."

"I've had first hand experience with that aspect of Dumbledore's character." Harry commented dryly. "I came here today to get a listing of all my holdings."

Greeva looked thoughtful. "While I can provide you with a listing of the vaults and holdings from both the Potter and Black Estates today, that would not tell us if you are entitled to any other properties or vaults in either the wizard or muggle worlds. To find that information, you would first need to go through the Inheritance Ritual."

"I've never heard of this ritual. Then again I don't know that much about the wizarding world, other than what I've picked up in the last seven years. What does this ritual involve?" Harry asked curious.

"It would be easier to show you." Greeva got up from his desk and went over to tap a section of the panelling on his office wall. The

panel melted away to reveal a small door similar to the ones in the vaults below the bank. Greeva ran a finger over the door in an intricate pattern and the door popped open.

The goblin pulled out a thin metal box about the size of a legal pad and after restoring everything to its original state, brought the box to his desk.

“After I say the spell to activate it, you place your left hand here.” Greeva indicated the hand shaped depression on the top of the box. “It will draw a little blood and read your magical aura, then any estates or holdings, that you are entitled to inherit will appear on a list within the box. Until the document within is removed, you will be the only one who can open it after that since it will be keyed to your magical signature.”

After a few moments debate Harry placed his hand in the handprint on the box. There was a small stab of pain then a green glow surrounded his hand and the box.

When the glow disappeared, Greeva said, “You can remove your hand. Now we wait. This could take a bit.”

As Harry resumed his seat, he glanced at the door and asked. “Would Dumbledore know the purpose of that box?”

Surprised by the unexpected question, Greeva looked at the door and asked a question of his own. “Is he coming?”

Harry nodded. He could feel the Headmaster’s magical essence moving closer.

Greeva quickly concealed his surprise. There hadn’t been a wizard who could sense auras from more than a few feet away since the time of Merlin. “No he wouldn’t. With the advent of magically binding wills about two hundred years ago, the inheritance ritual has become a thing that is rarely used these days and generally only in instances where there is no clear line of inheritance. We may start seeing it used more often though, now that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named is gone. A good many families were wiped out during the Dark Lord’s

reign of terror, leaving those with only the most tenuous ties to a family with a chance to inherit estates and monies.”

As soon as he'd finished speaking, there was a knock on the door.

“Come,” Greeva barked. When the goblin entered, he said, “Yes, Griphook.”

“I’m sorry to disturb you, sir, but the head of the Wizengamot, Albus Dumbledore, would like to speak with your client. He says it is a matter of the utmost urgency.”

Harry snorted at that.

“Dumbledore must really want to talk to you.” Greeva commented unnecessarily. “By invoking his rights as Head of the Wizengamot, we are required to admit him now.”

“Bastard no doubt wants to stop me from leaving the wizarding world.” Greeva was surprised by how cold Mr. Potter’s voice sounded.

“Since we can no longer delay his intrusion, would it be possible for us to conclude our business another time?” Harry gave the box a meaningful glance.

“Of course, Mr. Potter.” Greeva was quick to assure him. “Come back whenever you want and ask for me. If I am unavailable, I will make this information available to one of the other managers. Now before Mr. Dumbledore comes in, is there anything else we at Gringotts can help you with today?”

“Yes. After I conclude my talk with Dumbledore, I would like to visit my vault to withdraw some money and get it converted to muggle currency.”

“Very well,” Greeva gestured to Griphook. “Bring him in and then wait outside to escort Mr. Potter to his vault.”

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“Hello Harry,” Dumbledore greeted the younger wizard as he came into the office.

He was pleased to see the younger wizard wasn't looking quite so bedraggled this morning. Harry had managed to clean up and get some muggle clothes. The dark colours he was wearing made his slender form, the thinner almost elven-looking face and the streaks of silver-white in his hair that much more noticeable. Once he was back at Hogwarts his unusual looks would make him a highly sought after young wizard, even if he hadn't been the Boy-Who-Lived. Dumbledore felt a slight pang of guilt at the knowledge that those exotic looks were wholly due to his time in Azkaban and not to the normal process of growing up.

“Potter.” Harry was quick to correct him.

Seeing the icy green eyes staring at him from an impassive face, Dumbledore lost his train of thought. “Sorry.”

“You may call me, Mr. Potter.” Harry repeated. “I am Harry to my friends and those I trust.”

Dumbledore winced at the stated lack of trust, but knew he had no one but himself to blame. He had thrown the boy away at the first hint that he might be turning Dark. He, of all people, should have known better. “Maybe we should discuss this someplace else.”

“If you think I'm going anywhere with you, old man, then you really are senile.” Harry countered hotly.

“Then sirs,” Dumbledore looked at the two goblins, “may I request some privacy? Mr. Potter and I have some confidential matters to discuss.”

“I want them to stay,” Harry quickly disagreed, “as witnesses if nothing else. Just say what you came to say then leave me alone.”

“First, I would like to apolo...” Dumbledore began.

“Don’t! Just don’t! No apology can undo what you did. You threw me to the wolves... on Percy’s word! He’d spent most of my fifth year along with the Minister, trying to destroy you, remember and yet you instantly believe him over me.” Harry was just barely managing to hang on to his temper.

“Very well,” Dumbledore straightened up and held out three small rolls of parchment to Harry.

Harry eyed them suspiciously but didn’t touch them.

“They aren’t intended to hurt you, Ha... Mr. Potter.” Dumbledore told him.

Harry still didn’t touch them. “What are they?”

“Two are from the Ministry. The first is basically stating that you have been cleared of all charges and the conviction has been overturned. The second states that they have provided monetary compensation for the time you spent in Azkaban. It also shows the monetary compensation that has been awarded to Sirius’ estate since he too has been cleared. You are his primary heir and therefore have the right to that information.” Dumbledore told him.

“As if money can make up for the damage that place did to me or Sirius.” Harry muttered but they all heard him.

Wisely deciding to make no comment, Dumbledore indicated the parchment roll with the purple seal. “That one is from Hogwarts. You have been readmitted to the school and will be starting your sixth year classes on September 1st.”

“Well, I won’t be going back to your lovely school.” The sarcasm in Harry’s voice was so thick you could cut it with a knife. “I told you at Azkaban, I am leaving.”

“I’m afraid you have no choice, Harry.” At the icy green glare from the younger wizard, Dumbledore hurried on. “Per a decree by the Wizengamot, any under-aged wizard who is enrolled at a magical school must complete their education at the school where they

started, unless their guardian requests a change of school in front of the Wizengamot and provides a good reason as to the need for the change.”

“I was expelled by you, Dumbledore.” Harry growled. “That means you kicked me out, so that decree doesn’t apply to me.”

Dumbledore looked solemn. “I’m afraid it does. Since you were proven innocent of the crime you were expelled for, your name has been put back on the rolls of those students attending Hogwarts.”

“You just can’t resist meddling, can you, old man?” Harry paused trying to regain his temper, then asked. “And what if I decide to ignore this decree? Which I’m certain is a fairly recent one, or Hagrid, would have been readmitted once it was proved he wasn’t responsible for Moaning Myrtle’s death.”

Dumbledore decided to ignore the accusation of meddling, especially since it was true. And he certainly wasn’t going to admit that the decree was less than twenty-four hours old. He was on shaky enough ground with Harry as it was. That decree was meant for one and only one person, Harry Potter. “Hagrid was too old by the time he was found innocent. While that does entitle him to get a new wand, at the time he was found innocent in your second year, he was no longer under-age so the decree didn’t and doesn’t apply to him.”

He paused for a moment looking for the right words to answer Harry’s question and avoid angering the younger wizard further. Young Potter had proven last night that he was a very powerful wizard, though Dumbledore didn’t know how he’d gained this power. While he was fairly certain that Harry’s basic character hadn’t changed all that much, Dumbledore knew he was treading on very thin ice where the boy was concerned. Harry had never been one to intentionally harm another, and would only hurt those who had first hurt him and given that he had done a great deal of harm to the boy, though most of it had been unintentional, right now Dumbledore knew he was a prime target for the boy’s rage. The last thing he wanted was that power turned on him the way it had been turned on Voldemort. He decided to tell him a partial truth. “You have no choice about coming back, Mr. Potter. When you first set foot on the Hogwarts grounds, you became

subject to a binding magical contract that is intended to insure that you would complete your education there unless, as I said before, there is a request to change schools submitted to and approved by the Wizengamot. It will force you to return, since your name is on the roll of returning students for this year.”

“You know that’s twice now I’ve been told I’m subject to a binding magical contract and I’ve never seen either contract.” Harry observed then glanced at Greeva. “I didn’t know it was possible for minors to enter into legally and magically binding agreements and I know my Aunt who is my legal guardian, at least for now, didn’t agree to it. So it can’t be binding, can it?”

Surprised and yet oddly pleased that the most powerful wizard of the age trusted a goblin to tell him the truth instead of Albus Dumbledore, Greeva told him, “A minor can not enter into a magically contract, however, once you set foot on Hogwarts grounds, that constituted your aunt’s acceptance of the agreement. Even if your Aunt never gave her vocal or written approval, by allowing you to go at all it was considered implied consent.”

“So in other words I have no choice in this matter.”

The comment was directed to Greeva, but Dumbledore answered it. “No, you don’t, Mr. Potter, at least not until you turn eighteen or complete your magical education, whichever comes first.”

“And what if I choose to ignore your ‘binding magical contract’?” Harry inquired. “Will you send Aurors or members of the Order to fetch me, assuming they are brave enough to come?”

“You have no choice.” Dumbledore repeated. “The contract will force you to comply.”

Dumbledore wasn’t really sure about that, but he could bluff with the best of them. The school might indeed consider the contract null and void in Harry’s case, given that he, who in essence represented the school and all powers contained within it, had indeed snapped Harry’s wand.

“Ah, so there is a legal version of the Imperious curse.” Harry commented. “You just use it on children. I wonder if the parents of muggle-born children are told. I doubt it because if they knew, they wouldn’t let their children within a thousand miles of any magical school.”

Dumbledore’s face grew stormy at the thought of the spell that insured magical children got a complete education being compared to the Imperious curse. “We do not use the Imperious curse on children.”

“You don’t.” Harry just smirked. “What would you call a spell that forces a child to return somewhere they don’t want to go? I suppose it does something to encourage them not to change their minds. That is coercion, Dumbledork. Look it up in a dictionary.”

Dumbledore knew there was nothing he could say to change Harry’s mind about the purpose of the spell that insured children completed their magical education so he didn’t even try.

His face once more an expressionless mask, Harry resigned himself to spending one more year among the hypocrites of the wizarding world, before he could finally be free of it for good. He could probably break the spell, but that would mean going to Hogwarts anyway, since it was probably the source of the spell. The problem was that if the spell had existed since the Founders time, then it was probably woven into the other spells surrounding the castle, which would mean any attempts to negate it, might bring the castle crashing down. Thinking about it for a few moments, Harry decided to comply, at least for now. In a way it was a better solution for the long run, he wouldn’t have to rush disposing of whatever property he had in the wizarding world and he would have a chance to make those fools at Hogwarts pay. Yes a much better solution all round.

Deciding not to let Dumbledore know he’d won so soon, Harry asked, “Where’s Remus?”

“I’m sorry.” Dumbledore hoped he looked puzzled by sudden change of topic. He hadn’t expected this question so soon, but he should have.

“Where... is... Remus... Lupin?” Harry repeated a little slower as if talking to a small child. “He wasn’t at Azkaban with you last night and he certainly wasn’t at that farce of a trial I got, so where is he right now? And while we’re on the subject, where’s Hedwig? I know she wasn’t killed by those fools in Gryffindor House, so where is she?”

Knowing he couldn’t avoid the issue, Dumbledore just hoped that Harry wouldn’t kill the messenger. “Remus didn’t believe you were guilty of killing Neville Longbottom.”

Harry snorted. “So someone in the wizarding world had some brains. At least Remus learned, unlike the rest of you, not to judge things by appearance.”

“Yes,” there wasn’t anything else Dumbledore could say to that, given that it was the truth. “Anyway, he was looking for the proof of your innocence, when he was killed.”

“How?” Harry growled sounding almost like a wolf himself.

Knowing Harry would get angry if he found out later that any details were withheld, Dumbledore told him what little they knew. “Remus was found dead the night after the full moon. He’d been stabbed with a silver knife.”

“Which meant it was someone who knew he was a werewolf. Which would be just about everybody in the wizarding world thanks to Severus ‘I can’t let go of a grudge’ Snape.” Harry pointed out.

Dumbledore knew that accusation was true. Prior to Snape’s telling the Slytherin’s about Lupin’s condition, only a handful of people had known about it. “We assumed at the time that it had been someone with a grudge against werewolves who that knew he was one. Anyway, now that you’ve been proven innocent, we must assume it was a Deatheater, trying to prevent him from learning or possibly revealing the truth. Once they go to trial, we’ll know which one it was.”

"I'll bet it was Percy." Harry closed his eyes, determined not to let Dumbledore see the pain he was feeling. He would be sure to try and capitalise on it. "Where is he buried?"

Knowing nothing could take away the pain of losing the last link to his parents, Dumbledore did hope this information might ease some of the sorrow. "I had him buried in Godric's Hollow. Next to your parents."

"I'll have to be sure to go visit their graves. It's about time I was allowed to anyway." Harry commented more to himself than anybody else. Burying the pain, at least for a little while, he asked. "Where's Hedwig? Did those fools from Gryffindor kill her after they destroyed everything else I owned, while the teachers stood by and watched?"

"No, Hedwig is alive." The Headmaster was quick to reassure him. "However... I don't know where she is. Miss Granger decided that she would keep Hedwig, but Hedwig must have decided she didn't want to change masters."

"You mean she knew that Granger had betrayed me and wanted nothing to do with her." Harry corrected him. "What did she do?"

"The first time Miss Granger tried to use Hedwig to send a letter, your owl bit her hand to the bone and raked her talons across Miss Granger's head. She took off and hasn't been seen since." Dumbledore told him.

"Good for her. I hope she is okay, but at least she like Remus is free of your world of double-standards." Harry was pleased by the news that Hedwig might still be alive. He hoped she would return to him now that he was free but if she didn't he at least took comfort in the knowledge that beloved familiar wasn't serving one of his two-faced former friends. "If there is nothing else we need to discuss, then I will see you in September."

Dumbledore looked a little sheepish as he said, "There is one other matter."

“What now?” Harry couldn’t think of anything else the old bastard could want to do with or to him.

“We need to make arrangements for where you are going to be staying until the start of term.” Dumbledore finally said.

“You will be making no living arrangements for me!” Harry got to his feet tired of dealing with the interfering old wizard.

“You are still considered a minor, Harry,” Dumbledore backed up at the icy glare. “We have been trying to come up with a suitable wizarding family for you to live with for the next month and a half, since you no longer need to be hidden from Voldemort or his Death Eaters.”

“I will not say this again.” Harry growled. “You will be making no living arrangements for me! If I must live with someone, then it will be the Dursleys. At least I know to expect a stab in the back from them.” Not to mention, Harry thought to himself, it will give me chance repay the Dursleys for their many kindnesses. “One more thing Dumbledork I want no contact with anyone from the wizarding world, unless I choose to initiate it. No letters. No packages. No nothing. If anybody sends me anything they will get it back with a very nasty hex attached to it. Do we understand each other?”

At the Headmaster’s nod, Harry pushed past him and went out the door.

Dumbledore heard him say, “Griphook, would you please take me to my vault?”

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Dumbledore waited in the lobby for Griphook to return with Harry. When Griphook came out of the vault area there was a tall, well-built wizard with golden brown hair with him, instead of a slender dark-haired one Dumbledore had been expecting. A quick check of the orb he was carrying revealed that wizard to be Harry.

Walking up to him Dumbledore softly commented, "Nice glamour charm, Mr. Potter."

The grey eyes just glared at him and Dumbledore found himself strangely grateful that wishes couldn't be made reality otherwise he might be lying on the floor, dead.

"I will just escort you to the Leaky Cauldron." Dumbledore told him. "I have made arrangements with the Ministry for a car to take you from there to your Aunt's in Surrey."

Harry said nothing. He walked up to a desk and requested that the wizard money be converted to muggle currency. He also requested a security pouch to hold it. A few moments later the goblin handed over a pouch and the requested muggle currency. Placing the folded currency in the pouch, Harry headed for the door, ignoring Dumbledore.

Wisely deciding to say nothing further, Dumbledore moved quickly to catch up with Potter before he disappeared from sight.

If anything the crowd in Diagon Alley had grown even larger. Harry couldn't help wondering how the Alley could contain it without exploding out into the non-magical world. He pushed his way through the crowd well aware of the fact that Dumbledore was following him.

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Harry managed to get through the crowd and into the Leaky Cauldron a few minutes ahead of Dumbledore. If he could maintain that lead, he might just make it out the door into London and disappear before Dumbledore caught up with him. If he could have found somewhere to duck into that would get him out of Dumbledore's sight for even a few moments, he would have changed his appearance, but there were just too many people in the Alley for him to do that without being seen.

Handing over the room key and enough Galleons to cover a night's stay, Harry turned, intending to head back through the door into London. However when he caught sight of the group of red heads

near the door, he froze like a deer caught in the headlights. He hadn't expected to see the Weasleys here.

They must be looking for me. Harry thought, noting the way they were checking all the entrances to the pub and everyone who came through them. He also noted that not all the heads in the group were red. There was a bushy brown one in among the sea of red. Awfully brave of Granger to come here looking for me. I never took her for a fool before.

#~#~#~#~#

Molly continued to scan each new arrival. She was fairly certain that she would be able to pick Harry out even if he were wearing a glamour charm. And if she missed him, Hermione had been certain she wouldn't.

She needed to find him. She had to apologise for all the nasty things she'd said to him during his brief trial. She also had to make up somehow for her son's betrayal of one who had been thought of as family.

When Arthur had first told her what Percy had done, she hadn't wanted to believe it. No son of hers would ever serve the Dark Lord. Arthur had to be mistaken. Percy couldn't be a Deatheater. It was only after she had seen Arthur's memory of Percy's confession at Azkaban, that she had broken down and started crying. She mourned the loss of her son who chose the Dark over his family and the Light.

She had also spent a large part of the morning prior to Arthur's firecall about Dumbledore's request for a car for a trip to Surrey from the Leaky Cauldron, trying to figure out how she was going to repair the damage she and her family had done to their relationship with Harry.

Despite what those of her children who had been there had told her about how angry Harry was at the wizarding world, Molly refused to believe that the relationship with her unofficial seventh son was completely destroyed. Harry Potter had been a very loving child and she was certain she could make him understand and forgive them, given enough time. She was hoping she could convince him to spend

the summer with them given that he no longer needed to be hidden at the Dursleys.

She was starting to get a little worried when Dumbledore came in from the Diagon Alley entrance and went over to talk with a man with shoulder length golden brown hair. The discussion appeared to be heated then the younger man abruptly started heading toward them with Dumbledore walking along beside him.

Once the pair was close enough. Molly softly asked. "Albus, where's Harry? I thought you'd found him. Arthur said you called for a car to take someone to Surrey."

"Hello Molly," Dumbledore greeted the woman as if he were surprised to see her. "This is a wonderful surprise."

When the man with Dumbledore tried to push past him, the Headmaster put out a hand to restrain him. This earned him a glare from the grey-eyed man.

Speaking in a low, raspy voice, the man told the Headmaster, "If you are going to stand here and chat, then I will be leaving. I have things to do and can find my own way to where I need to be."

Molly glared at the young man and told him. "You should show Albus Dumbledore some respect, young man."

"I've learned the hard way, madam that respect should be earned not given. I've also learned that one should not jump to conclusions without all the facts." The grey-eyed man countered with an icy stare. "Something I would have thought you would have learned by now, especially given your son Percy's actions."

Shaking off Dumbledore's hand and leaving Mrs. Weasley in stunned silence, the stranger headed for the door.

His hand was on the knob when Hermione tugged on Mrs. Weasley's arm and hissed, "Harry!"

Moving quickly, Molly grabbed the stranger's arm before he could get out the door. "Harry!"

The crowd in the pub fell silent, looking for Harry Potter's trademark black hair and the scar.

All the patrons heard the man at the door tell Mrs. Weasley, "My name is Edmund Cristo, not Harry Potter. Which is a good thing considering how fickle the wizarding world happens to be. He is saviour one moment and villain who must be destroyed the next." The man turned his attention back to Dumbledore for a moment. "I don't need an escort, or any more of your interference in my life. Heed my warning, old man. It is the only one you will get."

(AN: To everyone who guessed the Count of Monte Cristo, your house has been awarded 10 points. Also, based on JK Rowling's books, I interpret the legal age to work magic as 17, but the age you are considered a "legal adult" to be 18, given that Mrs Weasley could prevent her twins from joining the Order still. If they were "legal adults" she couldn't have prevented them from joining. Some of you are probably going to be upset that Harry seems to be meekly going back to school, but believe me when I say he is not meekly doing anything.)

Payback Can Be A Bitch

Harry knew that he had left everyone in the Leaky Cauldron stunned into immobility by his exit, so he quickly took advantage of the few minutes head start it gave him. He only gave the Ministry car and its driver a quick glance. He definitely wasn't taking any method of transport arranged by that meddling old fool. Aside from the fact that he was in no mood to be gawped at by some idiot wizard who now thought of him as a saviour again instead of the next Dark Lord in training, he had no real desire to spend any more time with Dumbledore who would no doubt try and convince him that he should forgive everyone for their mistakes and get over the fact that they falsely imprisoned him. That would happen, he thought to himself, when Hell froze over and Voldemort, Dumbledore and Fudge danced Swan Lake together in pink tutus. He smirked at the thought of the three wizards dancing in a muggle ballet.

Harry briefly debated on whether or not to head to the Dursleys right now and start making their summer enjoyable. If he hadn't lost track of time, then it was still fairly early in the day, which meant that Vernon was probably still at work. That was unless they had decided to take advantage of the fact he wasn't going to be there to take a long holiday. If they had then he would have to revise his plans for making them pay for the last sixteen years of his life with them. Either way since he wanted to make a Grand Entrance, he would have to arrive at Privet Drive this evening.

Decision made, Harry soundlessly disappeared just as Dumbledore and Hermione stepped out of the Leaky Cauldron, only to reappear in an out of the way corner of King's Cross Station. Once there, he reached for the ambient magic around him and used it to prevent Dumbledore or anyone else from being able to track him, using his magical signature.

As soon as he was certain it would continue to hold without him monitoring it, Harry headed out of the station to get something to eat, go shopping, and maybe have a look around London. He'd never really seen it before, given that Vernon and Petunia never took him anywhere unless they had to.

Harry had just finished buying a number of shirts at a place called 'T-Shirts with Attitude' and checking the time on his new watch, realised it was almost dinner time.

Vernon should be home now.

Ducking into a cafe restroom a few blocks away, Harry soundlessly disappeared then reappeared on the lawn of #4 Privet Drive.

As he took a look around, Harry kind of hoped some of the neighbours were peeking through their curtains and had seen him arrive. He really wanted to destroy the nice comfortable illusion his so-called family had built for themselves. He saw Vernon's car in the driveway, along with the car he remembered Dudley getting from Vernon on his birthday last year. That meant the whole family was home, since Petunia rarely went anywhere without Vernon or Dudley.

The front door was locked, which no real surprise, but it wasn't much of an impediment either. Brushing his fingers across the lock, Harry let his magic manipulate the tumblers. Hearing the lock click, he opened the door and slipped carefully inside, softly closing it behind him. He didn't want the Dursleys knowing he was here... just yet.

A quick glance in the sitting room and the muffled noise of the television and conversation told him they were probably having dinner in the kitchen.

"Petunia! Vernon! Dudley! I'm hooooommmmmmmeeeeee!" Harry shouted in a falsely cheerful voice.

There was the sound of something hitting the floor with a crash. Before Vernon could rush into the hall to try and threaten him, Harry strode into the kitchen and got a surprise of his own. Marge Dursley was sitting at the table, wine glass in hand.

Oh this is going to be fun! Harry mentally rubbed his hands with glee.

Vernon had gotten to his feet, but before he could say anything, Marge who was slightly drunk, spoke up. "What are you doing here, boy? Vernon told me you'd been sent to prison for killing one of those

delinquents at that school of yours. Always knew you'd come to a bad end. As I said before, breeding will tell in the end. What can you expect from a drunkard and a slut but a murderer."

At that moment Vernon Dursley was just grateful that looks couldn't kill, not even for his freak of a nephew's kind. The boy's emerald eyes had become chips of green ice in an expressionless face and it seemed as though the temperature in the room was dropping as the boy said in a raspy voice, "Shut up you drunken bitch!"

Unwilling to let this freak insult his sister, Vernon growled. "Now see here boy, you will not speak to my sister like that. You will treat her with respect, or I warn you, you will pay."

Before Harry had a chance to comment on Vernon's threat Marge, who had recovered from her surprise at being yelled at by someone she'd always been able to heap abuse on before, came around the table and jabbed Harry in the chest with her pudgy finger. "I won't shut up, you ungrateful whelp. You were taken into this home out of the goodness of my brother's heart."

Harry snorted at this as he thought, they were saving their own skins.

"Though why he did it is beyond me." Marge continued, not having hearing the snort. "Personally, I think you're a waste of space. Then after all the blessings my brother has given you what do you do, you go and disgrace this family by killing someone and getting sent to prison for it. Vernon should have gotten rid of you the morning they found you on their doorstep."

To Vernon, it was like watching a train wreck about to happen, knowing he couldn't stop it. He remembered very well though Marge didn't, what happened the last time she'd provoked the boy. Vernon should have been relieved that there were no overt signs of magic, such as the lights flickering or things in the kitchen shaking, but he wasn't. The expression on the freak's face didn't bode well for either his family or for Marge. He wanted to intervene, but didn't out of fear of being turned into a toad or something.

It was clear to Vernon that whatever kind of prison those freaks had kept the boy in for killing that other freak, it had changed him. The eyes, he had hated because they were so full of fire and that showed the boy's refusal to break no matter what had been done to him, were now as cold as ice. Vernon shuddered as he looked into them.

"SILENCE!" Harry roared causing Marge to squeak and back up until she hit the table, shoving it back against Dudley, splattering the food on his plate all over him. Harry noticed that that didn't stop him from scarfing down everything he could get his hands on though.

Harry moved closer like a cat stalking its prey. Marge tried to get away from the angry young man. She was beginning to realise that she may have pushed him too far, especially given that he had already killed someone.

Hoping that the boy still had a fear of being expelled from that freakish school of his, Vernon tried to get control of the situation. "How many times have I told you I will not have any of that unnaturalness in my house? You know what will happen if you do anything."

"Nothing will happen to me, Vernon." Harry hissed like a snake, his eyes still on Marge. "They won't expel me for doing magic. You want to know why. Because Dumbledore wants me there."

The cold eyes focused on Vernon as Harry spoke loud enough to be heard by all in the room. "Marge, do you want to know why your precious brother took me into his home and wouldn't get rid of me even though he also felt I was a waste of space? It had nothing to do with kindness. It was to save his own arse and that of his cow of a wife and pig of a son. You see as long as I lived here, they were safe from Voldemort. You remember Voldemort, Vernon, the wizard that killed my parents."

Hearing the word 'wizard' and feeling slightly braver at this indication that the boy was insane, Marge spoke up again. "Wizard?! There's no such thing. Prison must've addled your wits, boy. What few you had."

Marge shrank back as the cold green eyes turned back to her.

“This is your one and only warning Marge Dursley. You will remain silent from this point on, or I assure you, you will regret opening your mouth. You see, magic is real.” Never taking his eyes off Marge, Harry waved his hand in the general direction of Petunia and the broken bowl that was still lying at her feet. The bowl quickly reassembled and floated into his outstretched hand.

He continued laying down the law. “While I am here, Marge Dursley, you will keep your opinions to yourself. If I hear one comment from you regarding either me or my parents, I promise you will learn first hand why it is not a good idea to meddle in the affairs of wizards.”

He gave Marge a considering look and knowing just how stubborn her brother could be, decided to give her a reminder of just what could happen if he was crossed. “You’re probably trying to convince yourself that what I just did was nothing more than a stage magician’s parlour trick. Let me show you just how wrong that idea is. I’m going to give you back your real memories of the events that happened in this very house three years ago, so you’ll have an idea of what I can do to you.”

Snapping his fingers, Harry watched with satisfaction as Marge’s face went pasty white before she collapsed onto the kitchen floor.

Seeing his mistress lying on the floor, Ripper raced out to attack the threat to her. He recognized the scent of the new two legs as being one he regularly put in its place at the bottom of the pack when he was here. He growled threateningly at the two legs but instead of being terrified and running as he had before, the two legs raised its paw.

The bulldog quickly noticed that he was rising and his paws scrabbled frantically as they no longer felt solid ground beneath him. When he was at eye level with the strange two legs, he instinctively knew something had changed. This one was no longer the weakest member of the pack. He was now the alpha male. The alpha was speaking and while he couldn’t understand all of it, the tone and posture of the new alpha two legs was clear. If he bothered the alpha again, then the wolf he sensed within would rip him to shreds.

Harry was pleased to note the fear on the Dursley's faces as the dog ran out of the room. "Before you and Petunia start trying to threaten and bully me, let's get a few things straight. Then I will tell you how things are going to be around here for the next few weeks."

Harry could tell that his choice of words enraged Vernon and the only thing keeping him quiet... right now, was the occasional glances he gave to his unconscious sister.

"As you can see," Harry waved his hand around, "there are no owls carrying letters threatening me with expulsion. Nor will there be. And the reason there won't be is quite simple. Last night I destroyed Voldemort."

"Surely those abnormal freaks didn't let you out of prison simply because of that." Petunia scoffed. "You did kill some boy at that school of yours after all."

The look Harry gave his aunt, made her squeak and back up behind the kitchen counter. "Did I say you could speak woman?"

Trying once more to regain control of the situation, Vernon said, "Now see here, boy..."

"No! You sit down and shut up!" Harry's expression made it quite clear that he would force them to comply. "You don't have any say over me any longer, Vernon. Nor do you Aunt Petunia. You have both made your feelings about me quite clear over the years. Now it is my turn. I'm going to have my say and I don't want to hear another word out of either of you."

Vernon and Petunia quickly moved to the table and sat down, before he could make good on the implied threat.

"Now to answer your question, Aunt Petunia," Harry began. "I was released from Azkaban when the real killer was found last night. Not so surprisingly, it turned out to be someone who worked in the Minister's Office, which is part of the reason why the Ministry will not

do anything to punish me for using magic before I turn seventeen in about two weeks. The Minister doesn't want to get on my bad side."

None of the Dursleys said a word. Even Dudley had stopped eating as he realised what Harry could do to them since he wouldn't be punished for doing magic.

"Now that that's cleared up, it's time to settle a few other matters. I'm going to make this short and sweet so that even a moron like Dudley can understand it."

Petunia started to respond to the criticism of her son, whom she considered the brightest boy in the world, but one look at her nephew's face convinced her not to open her mouth.

"Good girl, Petunia." Harry sounded like he was praising a pet for performing a trick well. "See you are capable of learning.... Now for the next few weeks, I will be staying here and you're just going to have to put up with it. I'm only going to give you one word of warning though, if you leave me alone, I'll leave you alone. If you don't, then you'll wish you had." Harry glared at his overweight cousin. "That includes your friends, Dudley."

Reading the promise of retribution in his cousin's eyes, Dudley gulped and nodded.

Continuing his list of conditions for a magic free life, Harry told them. "None of you will hinder me or force me to do anything I don't want to do. You've had over ten years of unpaid labour out of me and I think that is more than enough. From now on while I am here, I will be doing as I please. Is that clear to everyone?"

The Dursleys could only nod their heads, making them resemble those bobble-head dolls.

"Excellent!" Harry smiled for the first time. "Just remember that and we should get along fine, for however long I am here."

A hooting sound woke Harry the next morning. He rolled over, intending to send a nasty hex back to the witch or wizard who had

dared send him anything by owl post. He received quite a shock however when he saw a familiar snowy owl perched on the windowsill.

“Hedwig! I missed you!” Harry quickly moved over to the window to check out his beloved familiar and make sure she was ok. “How did you know I was out? How did you know where to find me?”

Hedwig gave him a look as if to say ‘Silly human, I can always find you’. While she looked a little thinner and scruffier than he was used to, Harry could tell that she was pleased to see him as well. Holding out his arm for her to use as a perch, Harry brought her into the small bedroom.

Showing her the transfigured bedroom Harry asked. “What do you think, girl?”

The snowy owl’s head twisted around, taking in the changed surroundings. Hedwig bobbed her head and gave an approving hoot.

“Give me a moment and you’ll have a proper perch.” Harry transferred the owl to the back of the chair before picking up one of Dudley’s broken toys.

As he transfigured the broken remote control car into a perch, Harry smiled at the memory of Dudley huffing and puffing as he moved most of the junk out of the second bedroom. He had no doubt that it was the first real work Dudley had ever done.

Once Hedwig was settled on her new perch, Harry told her, “I’ll be right back. I’m going to get you some food and water.”

Remembering all too well what had happened before when her Harry snuck in food before, Hedwig gave him a concerned sounding hoot.

“Don’t worry, girl.” Harry was quick to reassure her. “The Dursleys and I have come to an understanding. If they don’t bother me, I won’t turn them into mice for you.”

Harry had to laugh as Hedwig suddenly looked very predatory. “Sorry luv, but they’re still human. At least for now.”

Once Hedwig was settled in for the day, Harry went down and made himself some breakfast. The Dursleys studiously tried to ignore his presence. He was a bit surprised that Marge wasn't down in the kitchen stuffing her fat face like Dudley was.

Maybe she was waiting until he was gone to put in an appearance. Given that she had all the tact of a rampaging hippogriff, it was very sensible of her. Harry had no doubt that Marge Dursley would be unable to control her mouth.

Vernon and Dudley left as soon as they finished eating, leaving Petunia alone with her nephew.

After he finished his breakfast, Harry told his aunt, "If anyone comes around looking for me tell them I'm out and you don't know when I'll be back."

"Will they at least dress properly?" Harry could tell that she really wanted to say 'the freaks' but didn't dare.

"I don't know." Harry sounded as though he didn't care. "Probably since they don't want to stand out in a muggle neighbourhood. I did warn Dumbledore that I didn't want to be bothered by anybody from the Wizarding world and what would happen to anyone who was stupid enough to ignore the warning, but given that they've never cared about what I wanted before, I have no doubt they'll think I'm bluffing. At least at first anyway."

"You sound as though you're not too fond of those people any more." Petunia observed softly.

Surprised by her unexpected comment, Harry responded honestly. "I'm not. While I loved the magical world and still do love being able to do magic, I hate the people in it. The ones I trusted the most turned out to be backstabbing hypocrites."

He half-expected to hear 'I told you so' coming from Aunt Petunia, but oddly enough she didn't say a word and Harry thought at least for brief moment, he had seen a look of sympathy on her face.

"I assume you're referring to those Weasels." Harry didn't bother to correct her mispronunciation.

"Yeah them and the rest of the people of Hogwarts." Harry muttered. "Fortunately for me, I only have to put up with them for one more year. Then I can tell the Wizarding world to go to hell."

"If you feel that way about them, why go back?" Petunia couldn't help asking.

"Because I don't feel like destroying Hogwarts, just to get out of a magically binding contract." Harry admitted. "The castle has done nothing to harm me. Besides, doing it this way, I'll have a chance to see that justice is finally done to those who tried to destroy my life."

Petunia shivered at the cold, vengeful look on her nephew's face. As she turned back to the breakfast dishes, she almost felt sorry for those freaks... Almost.

How I spent my summer vacation

As Harry stepped outside #4, he was still marvelling over the fact that he and his aunt had had a somewhat civilised conversation. For the first time in his life she had talked to him like he was a human being with feelings, instead of a thing she had to deal with.

After doing a quick check to make sure there were no watchers magical or otherwise, Harry vanished from sight. He reappeared a moment later in an out of the way corner of King's Cross Station.

It was rush hour, so no one paid much attention to the slender young man in jeans as he headed for the loo. Nor did they pay any attention to a man with close-cropped, brown hair, hazel green eyes and wearing a business suit who came out a few minutes later.

Since he intended to eventually disappear off the wizarding world's radar, Harry knew he was going to need to open an account in a regular bank. He had decided on Barclays because they were supposed to have branches in most countries and the larger cities there.

As he stepped out of King's Cross station, Harry added a note to his mental list of things to do, about seeing if Gringotts could transfer monies directly to the account and what information they would need to affect the transfer.

Before going into Barclays, Harry got out his new wallet and made sure the initial deposit was there and that the ID he had duplicated from Vernon's wallet now matched his current appearance, instead of the one he originally intended to use. He doubted that Granger or the Weasleys had believed his denial about not being Harry Potter, given that Dumbledore had been with him. This particular glamour was probably far safer, at least for now. The face wasn't quite so memorable as the other had been. He was keeping the name though. It had been a spur of the moment thing that night when he gave it to Tom at the Leaky Cauldron, but he liked it and in a way he felt the last year of his life had been comparable to that of the main character in the Count of Monte Cristo novel.

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#4 Privet Drive

Wiping her hands on a dishtowel Petunia went to the front door. She hoped that whoever it was at her door this wasn't going to take long, because she still had breakfast dishes to finish.

There were four people, two men and two women, at the door all of whom looked vaguely familiar. Three of them had bright red hair while the fourth had bushy brown hair.

Before she could say a word, the older red headed man introduced himself. "Hello Mrs. Dursley. I don't know if you remember me, but my name is Arthur Weasley."

The name helped Petunia place where she'd seen the man. It had been here a couple of years ago when one of his horrible children cast a spell on her precious Dudley. She was grateful that her husband and son were out of the house and a quick glance at the sitting room told her that Marge wasn't in there. She must have gone back up to her room, even though Petunia had told her that the boy was most likely going to be gone all day. Petunia was grateful for that, because the last thing Marge needed was another shock. That might kill her and that would upset Vernon. She was also grateful that her nephew wasn't going to force her to be polite to these people. He had made it quite clear that morning those freaks could drop straight into hell and he wouldn't have cared.

Petunia didn't invite them in. "What do you want?"

"May we speak with Harry please?" The bushy haired young woman asked.

"He's not here. He left a couple of hours ago and didn't say where he was going or when he would be back." Petunia told them then started to close the door.

The older red headed woman stepped forward and put her foot in the door to prevent it from closing and asked. "Aren't you the least bit

concerned about where your nephew has gone or what he might be doing? I mean anything could happen to him.”

Opening the door a little wider, Petunia glared at the woman “No. I haven’t worried about what happens to that little freak for almost sixteen years and I’m not about to start now. Besides, from what I saw last night, a person would have to be an idiot to want to attack him. Now, if you are quite through wasting my time...”

“Can we come in and wait for Harry?” The red headed young man asked.

Just how stupid were these freaks? Petunia asked sharply, “Do you not understand English? I told you I don’t know when he’ll be back, nor do I care. Nor do I want your kind cluttering up my sitting room.”

Petunia glared at the foot that was still in the doorway and added, “Now if you are quite through, I have things I need to do and you are keeping me from them.”

The older woman reluctantly withdrew her foot, when she saw she would get nowhere with Petunia.

Petunia slammed it with a great deal of satisfaction and headed back to the kitchen. It felt so good to put them in their place and know they couldn’t do anything about it.

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Harry took a bite out of his burger, before making another note in the multi-subject notebook he had purchased from a stationary store. He was recording all the thoughts and questions he had come up with during his time in Azkaban, trying to come up with a cohesive list of evidence before he spoke to a lawyer about his charges.

So far his day had been very successful. He now had a bank account that he would be adding to slowly over the next month or so, so it wouldn’t attract the attention of the authorities, if he couldn’t get regular transfers made by Gringotts over the next year. He debated for a moment whether or not to keep his accounts at Gringotts and

just have them make regular transfers to the Barclays account, but decided he would have to wait to see what the Inheritance Ritual said he had before making up his mind about that.

He made a note in a different section of his notebook to see if Gringotts could recommend a lawyer who wasn't afraid of Dumbledore or the Ministry that he could speak to. He also added a note to ask them about how he could get access to his parent's will, since he had never seen it.

Once he had finished his lunch, Harry transfigured the suit he had been wearing into a pair of jeans and a comfortable shirt, before headed toward Tottenham Court Road. He spent a good portion of the afternoon wandering through the bookstores on Tottenham Court Road.

As he stepped out of the last bookstore on the road with a few more books to add to his new collection Harry shrunk the new books and slid them into the canvas carryall he had transfigured out of a plastic bag from one of the bookstores then had a brief debate with himself. He needed to go back by Gringotts to complete the Ritual and get answers to his other questions. However he was fairly certain that the wizarding world was still celebrating the destruction of Voldemort, not caring that their saviour hadn't done it for them. He'd done it for himself, for Neville, for his parents, and for his godfather. He added Remus to that list. However, since he wanted as little contact as possible with the wizarding world, that meant he would have to wait a week or so before going back to Gringotts.

Fortunately for him, he didn't have to worry about running short of money before then. The Galleons he'd had converted had provided him with over £30,000 and he still had quite a bit left. He didn't have to worry about the Dursleys stealing it if they found it either. The goblin who had converted his currency had guaranteed the pouch he had purchased for a small fee could only be opened by him once it was keyed to his magical signature and it was indestructible so they wouldn't be able to tear it open either.

He still had a couple of hours though until dark and he was in no hurry to head back to the Dursleys. A glance at the window of a

nearby store, containing a book labelled 'Wolves', reminded Harry of Moony and his intention of going to visit the graves of his parents and Moony. There was only one obstacle to overcome. He didn't know where Godric's Hollow was and just like apparating, he couldn't go somewhere he'd never been before. Stepping into a little alleyway and dropping the glamour, Harry decided to see if he could get himself some help.

"Dobby," he called softly, hoping the house elf would respond. He didn't know how house elf magic worked, or how the elf knew when he or she was wanted, especially if they were in another place, but he hoped Dobby could hear him.

A moment later his wish was granted as the excitable house elf appeared before him. "Master Harry, sir!" Dobby's voice sounded loud in the alley as he bounced in place. "I is happy to see you. Iz so glad you free. Knew you is good wizard and not hurt anybody."

"Shhhh," Harry gestured for him to lower his voice. "I'm happy to see you too, Dobby. But we're in non-magical London right now so you need to keep it down, okay?"

Dobby looked around surprised. "Iz never been to muggle world before."

"Dobby, I need a favour and Dumbledore can't know anything about it." Harry got straight to the point.

"What is you wanting?" Dobby asked slightly suspicious.

"Do you know where Godric's Hollow is?"

"You is not knowing where it is?" Dobby seemed surprised.

"Nope," Harry shook his head. "Dumbledore never allowed me to visit my parent's graves and I want to see them today. And I was told Professor Lupin is buried beside them and I want to see his grave too. They are the only family I had and I need to see them. The thing is I can't go anywhere that I've never been before, so I need someone to show me where it is. Will you take me there, please Dobby?"

“Master Harry should be allowed to visit family.” Dobby decided.
“Dobby take.”

Harry took the house elf’s extended hand, and then Dobby snapped his fingers. The trip felt like a cross between a portkey and going through the floo system. Harry found it slightly nauseating, but at least he was on his feet when he got to the other end. Looking down, Harry saw that Dobby had brought him right to their graves.

“Thank you, Dobby,” Harry whispered as he sank to his knees and reached out and touched the headstone that had his parent’s names carved in it.

Dobby nodded, the expression on his face solemn. “Is you needing anything else, Master Harry?”

“No, Dobby, thank you. I will be able to get back to the Dursleys from here.” Harry told the house elf, his attention on the headstone.

“If you is needing me, just call,” Dobby told him, “and I not be telling Headmaster I be seeing you.”

“Thank you again, Dobby.” Harry smiled for the first time since leaving Azkaban.

Dobby nodded and disappeared, leaving Harry alone with his family.

Harry became slightly annoyed when he noticed that while there was no other grave between them, Remus’ grave marker was some distance away from his parents. As if some were afraid that in death a werewolf would taint the Potters. They should be together as they were in life. There should also be a headstone for Sirius here, even though there was no body. He also noticed that on both headstones there was carved an image of a phoenix in flight. That made him angry. While he had nothing against Fawkes, he would be damned, if he were going to let the symbol for Dumbledore’s group of traitors remain on either headstone.

Reaching out to the ambient magic that flowed through the graveyard, Harry transfigured the separate headstones into one large stone. Closing his eyes, and visualising the images and information he wanted on the stone, Harry let the magic flow through the tips of his fingers, brushing away the old carvings and replaced them with what he wanted there. Even though he'd done this many times before on Azkaban, it was still interesting to feel the stone shift and reform under his fingertips. As soon as he felt the new pattern firmly settle in the stone, Harry placed a charm on it to insure his changes could never be undone.

Opening his eyes, he took a look at his handiwork. All four names were now there across the top along with the birth and death information, but below that, he had grouped a wolf, a stag, and a large shaggy dog around a carved lily. No trace of the phoenix remained. Below each image was a name; Moony, Prongs, Padfoot, and Lily and below the group he'd put the words. They were together in life, now they are together forever.

The sun had set before Harry finished pouring his heart out to the large silent stone and the occupants beneath it. If there had been anyone nearby he wouldn't have said half the things he did, but the magical trip wire he had set never went off, so he knew that no one had ever come near this part of the graveyard.

"I've got to go," he told the silent occupants beneath the headstone, "but I will be back. If only to let you know what happened with that fool Dumbledork."

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As soon as Harry arrived back at #4 Privet Drive, he heard a slight pop off to his right, indicating someone had apparated out.

Sighing Harry headed inside and called, "Aunt Petunia, I'm home."

Vernon came charging out of the living room and growled. "Those freaky friends of yours have been by here three or four times today."

“They are no longer my friends.” Harry countered, then told him. “I heard one of them apparate out when I came in, so some of them will probably be showing up in the next hour or so. If you don’t want to see or deal with them, then you might want to go out for the evening.”

“There is no way in hell, I’m going to leave my home to the mercy of those freaks or you.” Vernon told him.

Harry shrugged, “suit yourself. Then sit back and watch the show, if they are stupid enough to come.”

Not waiting to see what Vernon decided to do, Harry headed upstairs and dumped the contents of the canvas carryall onto the bed, before returning them to their normal size. He put the books onto the bookshelf he had transfigured out of the pellet gun Dudley had sat on, before moving the rest of the stuff to the desk.

Sitting down at his desk, he tore a piece of paper out of the note book and transfigured it to parchment, then wrote a quick note to Greeva asking him if they could meet to discuss his inheritance a week from today on the twenty-fifth around eleven and also to ask if he could recommend a wizard solicitor who was good at all aspects of wizard law and who wasn’t afraid of Dumbledore or anyone else in power.

Once the letter was sealed and addressed, he told Hedwig. “I’ve got a letter for you to deliver in a while. Once you deliver it, I want you to wait for a response.”

As the doorbell rang, Hedwig hooted with happiness, eager to be of service to her master once more.

He sighed as he heard Vernon holler. “Those freaks are back, so get down here and get rid of them!”

Given that Vernon had said freaks, not freak, Harry was willing to bet that the Weasleys were here. And as soon as he got a look down the stairs he saw that he was right. There were five Weasleys in the entry hall and one unexpected guest. Granger had come with them. She was standing next to Ron, surrounded by Mr. and Mrs. Weasley and the twins.

As he came down to the foot of the stairs, Harry noticed that there was no sign of his relatives. Probably hiding in the kitchen.

In a voice that could rival the chill of the Arctic, he asked. "What are you doing here?"

Since no one else seemed to want to break the silence, Molly Weasley said, "We came to see you, Harry dear."

The temperature in the room seemed to drop as Harry commented, "So I'm Harry dear again am I? Well as I told Dumbledore, yesterday, the name is Potter. The only ones allowed to call me, Harry, are my friends and those I trust. You and your family, madam, fit into neither category. Nor does the arrogant Miss Know-It-All who came with you. In fact, I don't even know why any of you are here, given your statements at the trial and the comments you made to me afterwards as I was being hauled off. What makes you think I want to see any of you now or ever?"

"Harry, we just came to apologise." Ron spoke up quickly.

"Is your son deaf, madam, or is he just stupid?" Harry noticed with pleasure that his former friend's face was growing red. He couldn't help wondering just how long the hot-headed fool would be able to restrain himself. "The reason I ask, is because I remember quite clearly telling him about two days ago that he and Granger were never to speak to me again. And even if he had trouble recalling what I told him in the main wardroom of Azkaban prison, he should have no problem remembering that I just told everyone here that you didn't have the right to call me Harry any longer. Surely his memory can't be that bad."

Harry paused looking thoughtful, "though now that I think about it, maybe his memory is that poor. He certainly forgot five years of friendship in a hurry. Trading it for the spotlight and the attention that comes with it."

"Now son, you have..."

“I’M NOT YOUR SON!” Harry shouted, drowning out whatever else Mr. Weasley intended to say. “If I were related to you traitors, I would do whatever was necessary to get myself disowned from your back-stabbing family!”

“Now that’s not fair!” Hermione was filled with anger as well. “We made a mistake last year and we’re trying to make up for it. You have no right to insult people or not listen to what they have to say.”

The emerald eyes that stared at Hermione were like chips of ice. The expression on his face looked a lot like Professor Snape’s did. The one that said he thought you were a bug that he was deciding whether or not to waste the time stepping on. Hermione tried to swallow the lump that seemed to have suddenly appeared in her throat.

When Harry finally spoke, his voice was full of venom. “And now we hear from Miss Know-It-All Granger, the fount of all knowledge. She who can’t resist poking her nose in to other people’s business and who is never wrong.” Then he growled, “but you were wrong, weren’t you and not for the first time either. You didn’t listen to me last year when I tried to tell you that I was innocent so give me one good reason why I should listen to you now. I guess your passion for justice and fairness only extends to house elves and things that are not human, not to those who are supposed to be your friends. How could you throw away five years of friendship? How could you possibly think I would kill Neville? Did you forget that I saved your life during our first year at Hogwarts? Remember the troll, Granger? Or do you have a very short memory, like your boyfriend here? Surely the fact that that I was responsible for you not dying during our first year should’ve been worth a few precious minutes of the know-it-all’s time. But noooo, you preferred to join the ‘Harry is an evil Dark Wizard’ club without even listening to my side of the story. I tell you what I’ll give your apology the same amount of attention, that you gave to listening to my side of the story last September. I think that’s fair, don’t you?”

Hermione was silent. There was nothing she could say because he was right. She hadn’t listened to what he had to say. She had been so certain of Dumbledore and McGonagall’s infallibility that when they

said Harry had been caught red-handed standing over Neville's body, she hadn't looked any further.

"What nothing to say." Harry observed. "You certainly had plenty of things to say both during and after my trial. And don't think I've forgotten what you did the day I was arrested. The Dementors made sure to play that memory over and over again."

"Hey, I was the one who knocked out the troll and saved both your lives." Ron put in and when Harry's icy stare was turned on him, he gulped and wished he hadn't said anything.

"Ah, once more we hear from our sufferer of terminal foot-in-mouth disease."

Ron couldn't help noticing that Harry's sarcasm could put the whole Malfoy clan and Snape to shame. He winced as he realised that Harry was just getting warmed up.

"Do I have to remind you, moron, of just who put Granger in the position of needing to be rescued from the troll in the first place?" Harry inquired. "Why it was the yearly winner of the Engages-Mouth-Before-Brain Award: Ronald Bilius Weasley. Not to mention the fact that you wouldn't have been there to knock the troll out if I hadn't told you that she was in the bathroom and didn't know about it."

"Mr. Potter," Arthur Weasley spoke up again, trying to avoid getting the young wizard any angrier than he already was. "We know that we made a mistake last year by not listening to you, but we want to try and make up for that mistake. Part of the reason we came was to invite you to spend the remainder of the summer at the Burrow with us."

Harry mentally applauded Mr. Weasley for his balls. It couldn't be easy to stand in front of someone you and your family had royally screwed and invite that person into your home.

"Why would you think I would want anything to do with any of you?" Harry's voice was again filled with venom. "I remember very well the actions of your loving family toward me the day I was arrested as well

as during and after my trial. The day you threw me to the wolves. I can never get back what your traitorous son and the rest of the Gryffindors destroyed.”

“Ron isn’t a traitor.” Hermione defended her friend.

“Oh and what is the definition of a traitor, Miss Know-it-All?”

Hermione hated that nickname. She thought she had gotten beyond that with him and Ron and now she was clearly back to square one at least as far as Harry was concerned.

“Well, we’re waiting.” Harry told her, doing an impression of Snape at his worst. “What is the definition of a traitor?”

“One who commits an act of treason,” Hermione stated, knowing full well where he was going with this.

“Come, come, Miss Granger only one out of ten.” Harry chastised, his patronising tone making her wince. “You know full well that a traitor is also one who betrays another’s trust, just as you, Ron, and the entire Weasley clan did to me. The Dementors made sure that your many kind words to me as I was being hauled off to Azkaban, were burned deeply into my mind. After all how many sixteen year olds can say that they will remember til their dying day a woman they looked up to as a surrogate mother telling them that ‘it is a good thing that your parents are dead so they don’t have to see what an evil thing you’ve become’.”

As Mrs Weasley let out a moan, Harry commented, “I wonder if you will say something similar to Percy at his trial, madam, or will you be a hypocrite and stand by him to the end. It’s a pity I destroyed all the Dementors, otherwise he could’ve had them to keep him company at Azkaban and to remind him of all your kind words to him.”

“If you think that I or my family condone what Percy did...” Mrs. Weasley began to get angry at what Harry was implying. Yes the boy had the right to be angry with them, but not to tarnish their family name.

Harry's voice rose over hers shouting her down. "I never said you condoned it, just that you were probably going to be a hypocrite and stand by him. He is after all blood kin, unlike I was. You will no doubt stand by him, even if it comes out that he was the next Dark Lord in training. You will do for him, what no one in your family would do for me."

Harry was fighting to keep control of his temper. "After all we'd been through and the help I gave your family, madam I thought that your family at least would have given me a fair hearing. I nearly died from the Basilisk's venom when I was twelve, because your daughter was stupid enough to write in an enchanted journal that belonged to Tom Riddle. And none of your own children who should have been able to see that something was wrong with her, ever figured out that something was going on. I provided the money that started the twin's business after the Tri-Wizard Tournament, when they were stupid enough to gamble theirs away with Ludo Bagman and he welched on the bet. It was my vision of Nagini biting your husband, that allowed us to find him in time to save his life when I was fifteen."

"All of you in one form or another owe me and how did you pay me back? By destroying the only memories, I will ever have of my parents and godfather. By ripping my soul to shreds with your hateful, hurtful words. By not even bothering to take the time to find out what really happened." His gaze roamed over the whole group. "I thought you of all people would know that I couldn't do what I was being accused of, but no you're no better than the rest of the hypocritical wizarding world. I thought that all of you knowing how Hagrid and Sirius had been framed would've taken the time to find out the truth, instead of believing what you are told like little children who need to be led by the hand. But nooo what do you do. You tow the party line, instead of bothering to think for yourselves. Why is it that no one in the wizarding world can think or reason?"

He glared at Granger, as she opened her mouth to say something. "Don't bother to tell me you can think and reason, because we both know you can't, Granger. If you had been using the brain you were given back in September, then you would have remembered that the wizarding world has this wonderful thing called Veritaserum and that it compels people to tell the truth. Why didn't you bother to ask why I

wasn't given it at my trial? None of you even spoke up and asked why I wasn't being given it. Just like the rest of the wizarding world, you preferred to assume I was guilty. Somebody found me over the body, so I must be guilty. Far better for the wizarding world to see justice quickly done, never mind that the person being condemned to hell wasn't guilty. We have swift justice and that makes up for the fact that the truth gets trampled into the ground and the guilty party goes free to kill again."

His eyes bored into Mrs. Weasley's as he commented. "I wonder how many people your son tortured and killed madam, besides Neville and me, I mean."

"Neville and I," Hermione corrected automatically, earning another glare from Harry.

He returned his attention to Mrs. Weasley. "I wonder how much blood is on your family's hands, Granger's hands, and the hands of Dumbledore and his Order, because you all couldn't be bothered to speak up and force Fudge to use all the tools at the wizarding world's disposal to determine the truth? I know that Voldemort was very busy during the time I was in Azkaban. I got to see all of the Death Eaters' activities while I was locked up through my visions. How many of those people is Percy responsible for killing? How many people's lives could have been spared, if you had just spoken up and asked that I be given Veritaserum to confirm or disprove my guilt? Or if the Ministry had just done its job properly?"

There was a pause and they could see him visibly regaining control of his emotions and pulling back in the magic that had begun to swirl about them. "You know I really don't want to hear anything further that you have to say. Leave now, before I do something I won't regret."

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Harry woke the next morning feeling a little better than he had the night before. It had taken several hours before he was calm enough to no longer want to go over to the Burrow and blow it to bits with everyone inside.

While he was getting dressed, Harry made a mental note to insure that whatever home he did get, it was slightly isolated from others and that he got a study outbuilding put on the property that he could use when he felt the need to vent his anger.

Once he was dressed Harry started to head downstairs for breakfast, but heard the flutter of wings in his room and went back in intending to greet Hedwig. The sight of about a dozen owls scattered on various perches around the room made him growl. Some of them were carrying letters and others were carrying packages.

Either Dumbledore hadn't passed on his warning about not wanting any contact with the wizarding world, or if he had, then the idiots who sent these owls had chosen to ignore it. Well they won't be ignoring it for very long, he thought to himself. He took several deep breaths. There was no point in harming the owls for doing the task they were assigned. The problem was their idiot masters. Well he would take care of that after breakfast. He would send Hedwig with a letter to the Daily Prophet or as he preferred to think of it the Daily Liar, making it quite clear what would happen to any witch or wizard foolish enough to send him anything further.

The owls began to rustle nervously when he made no move to take the letters and packages they were carrying. All this wizard did was stand there and stare at them for several minutes before he told them. "Return to your master or mistress. Their packages and letters are not welcome here."

As the owls took off, Harry almost wished he could be there when they got their letters back. Aside from the usual curses that were applied to someone you didn't like he had added an interesting twist. The moment they touched the letter, the words 'I am an idiot' would appear on their foreheads and they would remain there through September 1st.

Taking the letter from Hedwig, he opened it eagerly.

Mr. Potter,

I will be available to meet with you on July 25, 1997 at 11am.

Per your request, the best solicitor we at Gringotts could recommend would be Mr Alexander Boet. He is familiar with all aspects of wizard law. If you would like for me to I can try and arrange for him to meet you at Gringotts on the twenty-fifth. If you were to meet in one of our private meeting rooms, not even the Head of the Wizengamot could interrupt the meeting, given that once you enter the room and until you are done, the room is sealed and not even Gringotts can violate this seal. Please do let me know if you wish for me to arrange this meeting.

Also please do let me know if there is any further assistance that we at Gringotts can render to you.

Sincerely,

Ironknife Greeva

Since Greeva didn't know that he had already muddled up his magical signature so it couldn't be tracked, Harry was touched by the offer of using Gringotts' secure facilities for his meeting. Pleased that he might be able to get his legal business done without Dumbledore finding out or trying to interfere, Harry wrote back asking Greeva to arrange the meeting.

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Harry spent most of the next week taking day trips to places that interested him in Great Britain. He had several reasons for doing so.

The first reason was because he wanted to spend as little time around the Dursleys as he had to.

He also wanted see some of the country he had lived in most of his life. The Dursleys had never taken him anywhere unless they had no choice, so the only parts of Britain he had ever seen, aside from that rather frantic trip Vernon taken them all on in a vain attempt to out run the Hogwarts letters, had been London, and Hogwarts.

The last reason was he wanted to find a new place to live. His time in Azkaban had left him with an intense desire not to be cooped up, but first he had to find an area he thought he would be comfortable living in. Then he would contact estate agents to see what they had available in that area. His goal was to be living in his new home before he had to return to Hogwarts, or at the very least by the Christmas break. He didn't know what kind of home he wanted, but he did know what he didn't want. He definitely wasn't going to live in one of those cookie cutter neighbourhoods, like the Dursleys did, where all the houses looked like they were cut out of the same mould. He wanted a house with personality, just not in the wizarding world.

He also got a passport made under his alter ego identity so he could travel to other countries after his birthday and well as using a travel agent to book a couple of trips for him to take in August. One was going to be a weeklong tour of the French countryside and the other was to Las Vegas in America. The pamphlets on them had looked interesting, especially the one on the hotel/casino he had chosen in Las Vegas: The Venetian. It was supposed to be a little like Venice.

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Friday July 25th

Harry sat at the desk in his room, going over the notes he had written to make sure he hadn't missed anything. He was fairly certain with all of this information the solicitor was going to be very busy for at least the next year. He added another note to remind himself to ask this Mr. Boet if he handled muggle law as well. It would save him having to search for another solicitor, if he chose to retain the man's services.

At 9 am, Harry walked from Privet Drive to the bus stop to catch a bus to the train station. He was getting used to using non-magical mass transportation and in fact found it quite enjoyable when he wasn't forced to share it with the Dursleys. In the past week, he had learned the trick to travelling by train into London. Unless you were in a real hurry, it was always best to catch the train after nine, because it was less crowded and the ticket could be used as an all day pass on the buses and the underground.

He got into Charing Cross Station around ten and then went out to grab a bus heading in the direction of the Leaky Cauldron. He got off the bus a few blocks from his final destination and stepped into a muggle cafe to put on his alter ego, before heading to the Leaky Cauldron.

As he stepped inside the Leaky Cauldron, Harry saw that it was back to normal. He only hoped it was the same in Diagon Alley.

When the Archway into Diagon Alley opened, Harry was relieved to see that it was also back to normal. No huge mass of people crowded into the Alley, just the normal every day traffic.

Before heading to Gringotts, Harry stopped by Eeylops Owl Emporium to pick up some owl treats for Hedwig. Once he had the treats he headed slowly toward the bank, timing his arrival so that he entered the doors of the bank just as the clock in the tower was striking eleven.

Not seeing a goblin he recognized on the main floor, Harry walked up the nearest free goblin, handed over a note and quietly asked, "Would you please give that note to Branch Manager Greeva and tell him that I am here for our eleven o'clock appointment?"

The goblin stunned by the polite tone of the wizard, since most of them usually just snapped out orders to the goblins when they wanted something, nodded and said, "Please wait here while I see if he is available."

He returned a few minutes later and said, "Please follow me, sir."

Harry followed the goblin back to the same office he'd been led to before. The goblin knocked then opened the door, and gestured for him to step inside.

Harry dropped the glamour once he heard the door close behind him.

"Good morning, Mr. Potter." Greeva got to his feet to greet him but he wasn't alone in the room. There was another wizard with him.

“Manager Greeva, it is a pleasure to see you again.” Harry nodded toward the goblin, but most of his attention was fixed on the other wizard in the room. “Did I interrupt another meeting? If so, my business can wait a little while.”

Seeing the young wizard’s attention was on him, the other wizard introduced himself. “I am Alexander Boet. Master Greeva contacted me saying that one of his clients needed the help of a discreet solicitor, who wasn’t afraid to go against those in powerful positions. He however didn’t tell me it would be you, Mr. Potter. I am pleased to meet you at last and thank you for dealing with Voldemort.”

“You know you are the first wizard, I’ve ever met besides Dumbledore, who didn’t cringe at the mention of the Voldemort’s name?” Harry was pleased by how the man was reacting to his identity. He was calm and wasn’t reacting the way most witches and wizards did, glancing at the scar on his forehead, before staring at him awe and allowing their brains to dribble out their ears as they said stupid and inane things.

The older wizard shrugged. “In that one matter and that one matter only, Albus Dumbledore and I are in agreement. Fear of the name, increases fear of the thing or person.”

“I take it you are not a big fan of Dumbledore’s then?” Harry asked.

“Not really,” Mr. Boet resumed his seat. “He is a powerful wizard and his actions during the war with Grindelwald have earned him my respect. I was still in school at the time. I however do not believe he deserves the aura of infallibility that other wizards since then have given him. Not even Merlin was infallible. Though there are those who would prefer to have it thought he was.”

“I asked Mr. Boet to join us for this meeting, so that you could meet him and see if he was the one you wanted to have handle your legal matters.” Greeva told the younger wizard. “If you choose to have him handle your legal affairs then he will be able to advise you, if necessary on those aspects of wizarding inheritance law that fall outside of Gringotts’ authority.”

“And before we get started, may I compliment you as well, Mr. Potter, on the rather pithy and well chosen comments you made in the letter that the Daily Prophet published on Sunday.” Mr. Boet said with a smile. “My sister-in-law was rendered quite speechless for several hours because of them, for which I thank you.”

Harry liked the matter-of-fact way Mr. Boet was handling things so far. He was curious to see if he would continue to be so calm and unflappable once he heard what Harry wanted him to do. “Are you also familiar with and able to represent me in matters of muggle law as well, Mr. Boet?”

“Not personally,” the other wizard told him, “but I can recommend a good muggle solicitor if you wish. The lady I am thinking of is a squib so she is familiar with the wizarding world. She just prefers to live in the muggle world and have as little contact with the wizarding one as possible.”

“We’ll get to that later.” Harry told him as he also took a seat in front of Greeva’s desk. “You’re being here now, Mr. Boet saves me a little time, because I have one matter I want to take care of before I open this box and it involves wizarding law and Gringotts.”

“What matter is this, Mr. Potter?” Greeva asked curious.

“I would like to open a separate vault to be set up as a trust.” Harry began. “I want half the monies that were left to me from the Black estate to be placed in that vault along with the compensation paid to Sirius and I by the Ministry. I don’t want to touch one single knut of their guilt money.”

“And what is the purpose of the trust?” Mr. Boet asked, making a note.

“It is to fund the Remus J. Lupin Foundation for Werewolves.” Harry told them, the expression on his face serious. “He was the only wizard out of all those who personally knew me who didn’t believe that I was guilty. Since he is no longer alive, I want to do something in his memory to help others like him, who the wizarding world looks down on. I also want to get a will written so that if something does happen to me, my entire estate will then be used to fund the trust, at

least for right now. If I ever have a family, I will probably change at least part of that.” He looked at both goblin and wizard. “Can that be done?”

“We should be able to set up the trust vault, but fine details of how the trust is to be handled will need to be worked out.” Greeva told him, making a note on a pad in front of him. “Including who will oversee it.”

“I will want the goblins to oversee the financial end of things and possibly the day to day aspects, since I know I can trust you to adhere firmly to any contracts you may have.” The gaping shark’s mouth told Harry he had surprised the goblin.

“I thank you for the honour and trust you have placed in us, Mr. Potter.” Greeva finally spoke up a few minutes later. “I promise we will handle the trust you set up, exactly the way you would wish it to be handled.”

“I know you will. At least with goblins running it, I know it will not get too corrupt and it will help the people it is meant to help long after I am gone.” Harry turned his attention to the slender, black box sitting on the desk. “Now let’s see what we have in here.”

He picked up the box and tried to figure out how to open it.

“Place the box on the desk,” Greeva instructed and once Harry had done so he told him, “Place your thumb in the slight depression at the bottom as if you were lifting a lid.”

Harry did so and was rewarded with a slight click and the box popped open. Raising the lid, Harry saw there were several pieces of parchment contained within. Removing them, he commented, “I can’t possibly be heir to all of this.”

“Actually it is entirely possible that you can be.” Mr. Boet spoke up before Greeva could. “Between Grindelwald and Voldemort a great many wizarding families have been completely wiped out and not just in England, leaving those with only the most tenuous of blood ties in a position to possibly inherit great wealth. All they would have to do is come forward and attempt to claim it.”

Harry quickly skimmed the list of properties, businesses, and vaults, growing more and more stunned by the moment. It was the one at the bottom of the list that surprised him the most. Staring at it, he exclaimed, "How can I possibly be the heir to that?!"

(AN: Yes, I know I am evil, leaving a cliffy like that. If you were wondering what Harry looked like with the new glamour on, he looks like Methos on Highlander)

Plots, Plans and Schemes

Harry stepped from the Underground station at Kings Cross into the main area and headed for Platform 9 3/4. Hedwig would be on her way to Hogwarts once she finished her delivery to Gringotts. The Goblins for a fee had agreed to keep an eye on the business he had started in the non-magical world while he was out of contact for the majority of the year.

Today began his final year at Hogwarts. A year that would see justice meted out to all those who had wronged and betrayed him. He knew without a doubt that Dumbledore expected to use the year to somehow convince him to forgive him and the wizarding world for their final betrayal, but he had no intention of obliging the old man. In fact if things worked out the way he planned, his opening salvo in this campaign would be fired during the first week of school. He just hoped he was there to see it when it happened.

Once he stepped through the Barrier, Harry heard the silence spread outward like a wave as those closest to the Barrier spread the word that he was on the platform.

The wizards and witches stared at him silently, not sure what to do or how to act. This was Harry Potter the Destroyer-of-He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, and the young man they had betrayed. Finally one parent gathered up his courage and began to move toward the Boy-Who-Lived and that seemed to be a signal to the others.

As the mob of people began to move toward him, Harry gripped the straps of the backpack containing his shrunken trunk and the books he was going to be reading throughout the year. After wandlessly putting up a shield to keep them from being able to touch him or get too close to him, Harry started moving through the crowd. There were yelps from those who first encountered the shield as they were knocked off their feet. That gave those further away enough warning so that they didn't get too close to him, but they still shouted their thanks and good wishes. Harry responded to none of them. He wanted none of their praise or their thanks.

Once he was settled into a compartment, Harry pulled out a few books and after restoring them to normal size, settled in to read. He ignored the noise outside his compartment and most of the students who were getting on the train were not stupid enough to enter his compartment.

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As the students were getting ready to leave from Platform 9 and 3/4, Dumbledore and the teachers were going over last minute details that needed to be taken care of before the new school year started.

Professor McGonagall brought up one final subject that had been on the minds of all the teachers. "Headmaster, given how powerful Mr. Potter has shown himself to be are you sure it is safe to have him here? I mean given the animosity he must feel for the other students because of the events that occurred last year and the fact that you have basically forced him to come back to Hogwarts, what is to stop him from taking his anger out on his fellow students?"

The expression on Dumbledore's face was serious as he said. "I wouldn't have forced the issue with Mr. Potter, if I thought he might prove to be a danger to the other students. Part of the reason those laws were enacted was so that he would have to come back here and resolve the issues he has with us and with his yearmates."

"Personally," Snape commented, "I can't see why the Wizengamot went to so much trouble over one arrogant brat. If he didn't want to come back to Hogwarts, then I say good riddance. I am sick of the wizarding world bending over backwards to accommodate that Potter brat."

"No one has ever bent over backward for that child!" McGonagall countered stiffly.

"Oh no. Then who made the brat Seeker during his first year here, against all the rules?" Snape questioned. "Not to mention bought him the newest broomstick on the market at that time."

Before an argument could start, Dumbledore spoke up. "Severus, there are a number of reasons why Harry must come back to Hogwarts, not the least of which is finishing his magical education."

Snape eyed the Headmaster suspiciously. "What are the other reasons?"

"Due to what has happened to Mr. Potter over the last year, he has a great deal of unresolved anger toward the wizarding community." Dumbledore told the assembled teachers. "We have one year to try and work through the anger, so that we do not lose him. He needs the wizarding world as much as we need him, though he does not realise it yet."

"Why only one year?" Professor Flitwick inquired. "I thought he was being put in the sixth year classes. Are you changing that plan?"

"No, Filius, Mr. Potter will be taking sixth year classes." Dumbledore assured him. "There is no way he could possibly be ready for the NEWTS by the end of the year. However, given that he will be eighteen next July, the decree put in place by the Wizengamot will no longer apply to him. And if he doesn't wish to return, we will have no way to force him to comply."

"I still don't see why we should be forced to teach an unwilling student." Snape complained. "The ones who actually want to be here cause more than enough problems. Mark my words, Dumbledore, whatever meddling you are planning on, it will blow up in your face."

"Have you suddenly become a seer, Severus?" Dumbledore asked, before his expression became serious once more. "I am willing to take that risk and I am asking you all to take it with me. I, for one, will not allow the anger he is carrying around to fester within him and warp him into something evil, the way anger turned another promising young wizard named Tom Riddle into Voldemort. We have a lot to make up to Mr. Potter for, not the least of which was our lack of faith in him last year, which led to his unjust incarceration."

Everyone had fallen silent at the mention of the Dark Lord's name and some of the teachers flinched.

“So Potter is going to be given even more special treatment.” Snape looked disgusted.

“No Severus he will not.” The Headmaster countered. “He will be treated like any other student.”

“You however might try seeing Harry as a person instead of as James Potter, Severus.” Professor McGonagall put in. “It might help if you think of him as Lily’s son instead of James’.”

“I will treat Mr. Potter as he deserves to be treated.” Snape declared loftily.

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Shortly after the train pulled out of the station, a steady stream of people began coming by the compartment Harry was sitting in. He managed to stop most of them from trying to come in, by giving them an icy stare worthy of Severus Snape. The only one it hadn’t worked on was Luna Lovegood. She had just met his stare with one of her own and then sat down in the seat opposite him and began to read her copy of the Quibbler. He didn’t bother to try and force her to leave partly because she had been Neville’s girlfriend and partly because she wasn’t trying to talk to him.

It had been an hour since the door last opened, but when it slid open again, Harry readied his icy stare to get rid of the intruder. It turned out to be a pair of them this time: Granger and the Weasel’s kid sister who was standing slightly behind Granger wearing a cap pulled low over her forehead. Granger was already dressed in her school robes and he saw she wearing the Head Girl badge. No real surprise there, she been acting like she had it ever since first year. However that badge and those robes clashed with her pale thin face and the red-rimmed eyes.

Arrogant know-it-all, Harry thought to himself, just as bad as Percy. Always thinking she’s right and that those in authority are never wrong. At least not til her face is rubbed in it.

When the pair remained standing in the doorway, despite the fact that his expression was clearly telling them they were not welcome, Harry began to wonder just what the traitorous Weasel was hiding under that hat. Giving into his curiosity, Harry waved his hand in the direction of the hat, knocking it off her head and smiled when he saw written in neon pink letters the words: 'I AM AN IDIOT!' So she was one of the ones who had sent him a letter or package.

As he watched the colour of the lettering changed one letter at a time from pink to orange as the girl's face grew beet red. He didn't remember adding a colour changing charm that was tied to a person's emotional state to the spell on the returned letters, but that didn't matter. He was quite pleased with the effect. Especially how quickly the colours changed as Miss Weasley started looking around for her hat.

"Were you wanting something?" Harry asked sarcastically, when they still made no move to leave.

"I... uh..." Ginny began before stammering to a stop and then trying again. "I... um..."

"Oh that was really intelligent of you." Harry sneered. "Is it actually possible for you to finish a whole sentence, or are you so narcissistic that the only word you can say is 'I'?"

If it were possible, the girl's face grew even redder.

Seeing that Ginny was too upset and nervous to say anything, Hermione spoke on her behalf. "We came to get you to remove the hex you put on Ginny."

"Sticking your nose into other people's business again, Granger?" Harry's voice was now filled with venom. "What's the matter? Couldn't a know-it-all like you remove the spell? I thought you knew everything. At least that's what you've had us believing. Nice to know it's not true."

Hermione's face flushed as she looked down at the floor of the compartment.

“The spell stays.” Harry told them. “It’s quite useful really. It lets people know right up front she’s an idiot without having to figure it out for themselves, quite a time saver really. Now if that’s all, why don’t you just go on about your Head Girl business and take the traitorous idiot with you.”

As the two girls left, Luna spoke up for the first time. “Nice spell. I liked the way you got the words to change colours depending on the person’s emotional state.”

Surprised by the comments, Harry said, “I take it they aren’t two of your favourite people.”

“Not anymore.” Luna looked up from the Quibbler. “They are idiots. Anyone with brains should have known that you didn’t kill Neville. Nor would you have joined the Dark Lord, no matter what he promised you. That would have betrayed your parents and your godfather who all died trying to protect you. I may not be a Gryffindor or Hufflepuff, but I can recognise an honourable person when I see one. I tried to speak up for you that day and wanted to speak up for you at your trial, but no one wanted to listen to Looney Luna.”

Harry could see that she was telling the truth. “Thank you. I think you and Remus were the only two who didn’t believe I killed Neville.”

Luna nodded and returned to her reading.

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The next interruption was one that Harry had been expecting. It just wouldn’t be a trip to or from Hogwarts without Malfoy intruding.

Malfoy burst in with Crabbe and Goyle behind him, wand drawn and his mouth open ready to utter his curse, but Harry froze them in place with a single thought. He had left Malfoy’s head free to move around. He was interested in hearing the threats and posturing the little ferret had come up with this year, especially given that he couldn’t threaten Harry with Voldemort or his father.

“Well, if it isn’t Draco Malfoy, the amazing bouncing ferret.” Harry commented as he removed the wand from the blond’s frozen hand. “What did you think you were going to do to me?”

“Let me go, Potter.” Malfoy growled.

“Now why would I want to do that,” Harry inquired. “You come in here intending to try and harm me, possibly even kill me, so what makes you think I would want to give you another shot?”

“You’re going to pay Potter, for what you did.” Malfoy spat out.

“Comments like that are definitely not going to encourage me to release you.” Harry pointed out. “I wonder what Moldysorts and your idiot father would have made of your current predicament? I thought Slytherin’s were supposed to be cunning, but you’re acting more like a Gryffindor than a Slytherin.”

Malfoy’s face reddened at the insult.

“I can’t help wondering if you might have been sorted incorrectly.” Harry continued. “I mean you are always acting before you think and as I recall that supposed to be a Gryffindor trait. Though given who your godfather is, I’m not real surprised that you act before you think a situation through. He can’t seem to think a situation through either. Your father and Snape aren’t any brighter or more cunning than you are apparently. I mean they both followed a half-blood, who they believed would purify the wizarding world. At every meeting they had to grovel and debase themselves in front of a half-blood monster, believing him to be the pure blood descendant of Salazar Slytherin. Not exactly shining examples of cunning and intelligence were they? Who knows maybe the whole of Slytherin House has been missorted all these years. Maybe all of you should have been in Gryffindor. Or maybe you should have been in Hufflepuff all this time.”

“I’m more than cunning enough to take you, Potter.” Malfoy snapped out, unwilling to allow the insults to continue.

“Oh, please,” Harry mocked him, “even with the help of those two human statues behind you, you couldn’t take me on my worst day.”

"I don't need any help to take you down." Malfoy growled.

"Yes, you do." Harry disagreed. "You're a bully, plain and simple, just like Moldyshorts, the monster you were going to one day follow, was until I burned him up from the inside out. Just like your idiot of a father and all those other Deatheaters who are now awaiting sentencing, though I doubt the wizarding world will give them the sentence they deserve."

"And just what would you have done to them?" Malfoy sneered. He knew Potter's type. When push came to shove they always wimped out.

"Oh I'm a big believer that the punishment should fit the crime." Harry told him. "If it were up to me, I would bind their magic then put them into a muggle style prison with the worst of muggle prisoners. I would make sure that the muggle prisoners knew that they like to hurt, rape, torture, and murder children. If the rumours I've heard about muggle prisons were true then the Deatheaters would be considered as even lower than the cockroaches to those muggle prisoners. Of course there would have be spells on the cells to stop the muggles from killing them, but other than that they should be allowed to do whatever they wanted to the Deatheaters."

Draco stared at the Boy-Who-Lived speechless, unable to believe what he had just heard. When had Potter become so vicious?

Harry sat back down, looking thoughtful. "You know who you remind me of? Ronald Bilius Weasley that's who. You both act before you think things through and you both are definitely sufferers of terminal foot-in-mouth disease. Maybe you're related. Given the inbreeding among most of the pure-bloods, I wouldn't be a bit surprised."

"There is no way in hell, I am related to that moronic little weasel or his family." Malfoy retorted.

"Draco, Draco, that's no way to talk about your relatives." Harry shook his head. "I tell you what, why don't you go talk it over with your cousin. I'm sure he'd enjoy it."

Harry waved his hand and Draco disappeared from the compartment. He then unfroze Crabbe and Goyle and told them. "Why don't you go find your boss? I'm sure he's on the train somewhere."

"Where did you send him?" Luna asked curious.

"The loo near the prefect's compartment." Harry told her. "Made sure he landed feet first in it."

Luna laughed.

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When the train started getting closer to Hogwarts, Luna got up to go change into her school outfit and robes.

"Harry, I'll leave you alone so you can change into your robes." Luna told him.

"Didn't bother getting another set of school clothes, after the Gryffindors burned the others." Harry told her. "I didn't see any reason to, given that I didn't destroy them and I didn't want to be here in the first place. This is what I am wearing to the feast. If they don't like it, they can go jump in the lake."

Harry stood up and let her get a good look at the t-shirt and black jeans he was wearing. The t-shirt was bright yellow and written in black across it were the words: "Don't Piss Me Off. I'm Running Out Of Places To Hide The Bodies".

"That should provoke some interesting reactions, especially from the teachers." Luna commented.

"I expect it will, especially from McGonagall." Harry picked up his book again. "I'll see you in a bit."

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As they got off the train and headed for the coaches, Harry heard Hagrid calling, "Firs' years over here."

Harry got quite a few stares as he escorted Luna to one of the thestral drawn carriages, given that he was the only one not wearing the school uniform and the fact that he was carrying a backpack.

A couple of Hufflepuff second years joined them in the carriage, before it took off and wound its way up to the castle.

Professor McGonagall was in the entry hall of the castle, and when she caught sight of Harry, she snapped out. "Mr. Potter, where is your school uniform? You can't go into the great Hall looking like that. And you should have left that bag on the train. It would have been brought up to your dormitory."

"Why would you think I would leave anything of mine where anyone in this school can get hold of it? All my possessions were burned up the last time I was foolish enough to trust anyone in this school and leave my things unguarded, remember Professor?" Harry's face was an expressionless mask. "Your memory can't be that bad, ma'am, given that you had a front row seat for what the Gryffindor Prefects did."

McGonagall looked flustered for a moment, before she asked, "Why didn't you purchase a new uniform?"

Harry told her flatly. "I didn't destroy the ones I had and saw no reason to waste my money replacing something I hadn't damaged or outgrown, not to mention something I didn't want in the first place. If you want me to have a school uniform that badly, then I suggest you have those who destroyed my possessions replace them."

Professor McGonagall, raised her wand, and attempted to transfigure the clothing Potter was wearing into the appropriate outfit, but nothing happened to the muggle clothing. She tried again, with the same result.

"Are you finished with me yet, Professor?" Harry sounded bored. "I would either like to go into the Great Hall, or if as you say, I am not to

be allowed in there, dressed like this, then I will go down to the kitchens and get something to eat.”

“I must insist that you change your clothing into the appropriate school outfit, or remove the charm that is preventing me from doing so.” McGonagall ordered, not realising that a small crowd was gathering in the doorway to the Great Hall behind her.

“No ma’am, I will not.” The expression on Harry’s face was unyielding. “So if you will excuse me, I will be on my way to the kitchens to get some dinner. Would you mind telling me where I will be staying during my time in this prison of yours and the password to get in? That way I can get in since I apparently won’t be eating with the rest of the students.”

“You are a Gryffindor. You will be in the Gryffindor tower, in the sixth year boy’s dorm.” McGonagall winced at Potter’s choice of the word prison for Hogwarts. She had never thought she would hear any student call Hogwarts a prison. “The password is Victory.”

“I am not a Gryffindor.” Harry disagreed. “The students who make up the house you head made that quite clear last year.”

She had also never thought she would see in her lifetime a student in this school openly defy her and for the first time in her life she felt trapped because of it. Mr. Potter needed to be in the Great Hall, not isolating himself, if the Headmaster’s plan was to work, but she could not allow him to enter the Great Hall in an inappropriate outfit. And Dumbledore had specifically said that Potter was to be treated like any other student. “Five points from Gryffindor for improper attire. You will either change your current outfit into the correct attire, or remove the charm that is preventing me from doing so. Failure to do so will result in you having detention tomorrow night.”

“So,” Harry shrugged, “I really don’t care what you do. I didn’t want to come back here anyway. Dumbledork forced this situation on me and so you’re just going to have to live with it. I will not allow you to change the clothing I spent my money on into what you deem appropriate attire. If you wanted me dressed in the correct attire, then

you should not have allowed the students of your house to incinerate all my clothing last year while you stood by and did nothing.”

The crowd in the doorway was stunned by the tone of Potter’s voice. Other than the Weasleys and Hermione Granger, no one had ever heard such malice from the Boy-Who-Lived before.

McGonagall knew she didn’t have much time. The first years would be arriving in a few minutes and she must be here to greet them. Looking back toward the Great Hall she saw the crowd of student standing in the doorway and yelled, “All of you take your seats in the Great Hall immediately!” She also caught sight of the Head Girl and ordered, “Miss Granger escort Mr. Potter to the side room off the Great Hall and ask the Headmaster if he would speak with him.”

“Mr. Potter,” Hermione gestured for Harry to follow her.

Harry did, smirking at the other students as he was led through the Great Hall to the side room.

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The Headmaster arrived just as Harry made himself comfortable.

“Mr. Potter,” Dumbledore spoke up as soon as he saw Harry. “I understand there is a problem with your choice of attire.”

Harry looked down at what he was wearing. “I don’t see any problem with it. At least I didn’t come in starkers.”

“There is a uniform code, Mr. Potter.” Dumbledore began.

“And unless you have forgotten, old man,” Harry interrupted, “all my possessions were burned up by the pyromaniacs who live in Gryffindor tower.”

“You should have gotten yourself a new school uniform then.” Dumbledore told him.

“And pray tell why should I have spent my money to replace what the Gryffindors destroyed?” Harry inquired sarcastically. “Aside from the fact that that would mean they got off scott free for their acts of vandalism and arson, I didn’t want to come here in the first place. Why should I buy something I have no intention of using once I leave this place forever?”

“The school requirements state that you must have and wear the school uniform.” Dumbledore countered.

“Then kick me out.” Harry told him. “I don’t want to be here in the first place remember!”

“Tomorrow morning Professor McGonagall will take you to Diagon Alley to purchase your school uniform.” Dumbledore told him. “For tonight, and tonight only, you will be allowed to attend the opening feast in what you are wearing.”

“Unless you plan on making those who destroyed all my school supplies last year, cough up the money to pay for them, then she will be wasting her time and mine.” Harry told him. “I told you, I will not be spend one single knut of my money to replace what was destroyed while the Heads of House made no move to stop it. They will also have to cough up the money for all the other supplies on your list, because I didn’t get those either.”

“Harry,” Dumbledore began, but seeing the angry expression on the young man’s face, quickly said, “Mr. Potter, how do you expect to pass your classes, without any of the necessary materials?”

“I don’t.” Harry stated simply. “I am just here, marking time and taking care of some business until I can get out of here. You may have forced me to come here, Dumbledork, but you can not force me to learn anything that your inept teachers may try and teach.”

“Harry,” Dumbledore said quickly. “Don’t waste this chance you’ve been given to start over. Not many people get the chance to start over. Don’t let the anger you have within you keep you from making friends and moving on with your life. You have to let go of it and forgive those who have wronged you.”

Harry got to his feet and asked tonelessly. "Are you done?"

"For now." Dumbledore realised it was too soon to expect to make any headway, but he had hoped that some of the boy's anger toward the wizarding world had begun to ease, so that he might at least hear what was being said.

"Good," Harry pushed past the Headmaster and walked out into the Great Hall.

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"I see the favouritism has begun." Snape commented once the sorting was completed. The yellow t-shirt that Potter was wearing stood out amongst the sea of black, even if the brat hadn't been sitting at the end of the Gryffindor table.

"Not at all Severus," Dumbledore assured him, then turned to McGonagall who had just joined them. "Minerva, tomorrow, you will be taking Mr. Potter to Diagon Alley to get all of his school supplies. And you will charge the purchases to the school account."

"Why the school account, Headmaster?" McGonagall had no problem with taking the boy to get his supplies, but didn't understand why the school would be paying for them when the boy clearly had more than enough money to pay for them himself.

"Young Harry had a valid point about one thing." Dumbledore told the two professors as he sat back down after making his welcoming speech. "If the Heads of House hadn't stood by and allowed it to happen, he would have had his school supplies for sixth year as well as the invisibility cloak that belonged to James, the photo album, and the Firebolt Sirius gave him. Since no teacher made any attempt to stop the destruction of his personal belongings by students of this school, then Hogwarts must pay to have them replaced."

"And what of the Gryffindors who destroyed the items in the first place." Snape wondered. "Are they to avoid having to pay for the destruction they caused?"

“No, they will not.” Dumbledore told him. “The cost of replacing one Firebolt will be divided among the parents of all Gryffindor students from second year through seventh, since we will not be able to charge it to those who were not here last year and are not here now. A letter will be sent to every parent explaining the reason for the charge. We will allow the Gryffindors to present the Firebolt to Harry. It may help to heal the rift between them.”

“In that case Headmaster, we might want to turn the task of replacing the photo album and presenting it over to Miss Granger.” McGonagall suggested. “It might help repair the damage to her relationship with him as well.”

“An excellent idea, Minerva,” Dumbledore told her.

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Unaware of the plans being made at the head table, Harry filled his plate and ignored anyone’s attempts to get him to talk. Those few who were somewhat persistent, he glared at until they left him alone.

Once they were released, from the Great Hall, Harry took the quickest route to the Gryffindor tower. He wanted to get an idea of who his dorm mates were going to be before they got there given that he hadn’t been at the feast during his second year.

There were six beds in the sixth year dorm. And five of them had trunks in front of them, which made the sixth one his. The names on the trunks were vaguely familiar, but the only sixth year he knew by sight was Colin Creevy and that was only because the fool had kept jumping out and taking pictures of him like a celebrity stalker. He wrote a quick note and left it on Colin’s bed warning the little fool that if he tried to take pictures of him this year, he would stick that camera of his somewhere painful.

He still hadn’t decided if he was going to stay where they put him, or go to the Room of Requirement. Though that might not be a good idea, given that everybody and his brother now knew about it. After a

few moments thought he decided he would stay in Gryffindor for a few days and if the attempts to try and get him to forgive them got to be too much, he'd find some place else to stay. The Chamber of Secrets was an option if he couldn't find anywhere else, since he was the only one that could access it, though it was a bit of a gloomy option.

Opening his backpack, Harry pulled out his trunk and restored it to normal size long enough to remove his pyjamas, robe and shower gear. Once the shrunken trunk was back in the pack, he headed out of the dorm room to take a shower.

He could hear the noise in the common room as he moved down the hall toward the showers.

"Harry!" Colin's voice called. "Hermione is looking for you."

"Any idea why?" Harry asked smirking as he noticed that Colin was also sporting 'I am an idiot' on his forehead.

"She didn't say, just that she needed to talk to you." Colin told him.

"Okay, I'd better go see what Miss Know-it-All wants." Harry headed down to the common room. He wasn't really interested what Granger wanted, but knowing how persistent the know-it-all could be, he really didn't want her bursting in on his shower.

As soon as he reached the stairs that led to the common room he saw Granger waiting for him.

"Granger, Creevy said you wanted to see me." Harry told her.

"Yes, Professor McGonagall wanted me to pass on a message, since she didn't have a chance to tell you herself." Hermione told him. "She wants you to meet her in the Great Hall at eight tomorrow morning. Dumbledore has made arrangements for her to take you to get your school supplies and uniforms."

"Okay. Anything else?" Harry really didn't care, but he thought he would be polite, at least right now.

“Why didn’t you get your supplies in Diagon Alley before school, Harry?” Hermione asked.

“Because I didn’t feel like spending good money for something I didn’t want and that the pyromaniacs of Gryffindor destroyed last year.” Harry snarled then told her. “Granger, how about we keep things simple. You and I will talk to each other only when it concerns Hogwarts business. I’ll at least pretend to be civil to you as long as you adhere to that boundary. If you try to get involved in my life, or try to pry into my personal business, then you will regret it. You are no longer my friend and I really wonder if you ever were. Once this year is over and we go our separate ways, I never want to see you or hear from you ever again. Have I made myself clear?”

(AN: This is just a filler chapter. The next chapter will be the first batch of revenge and the target is Snape Also the lettering is like a mood ring. For those of you too young to remember the mood ring or who have never seen one, it changes colour depending on your mood. Actually it was heat sensitive, and the more heat you were putting out the darker the colour would get.)

They Say Revenge Is A Dish best Served Cold, But I Like Mine Very Hot

The bell over the door to Ollivander's shop rang as Harry followed McGonagall inside. He had been trying for the last twenty minutes to convince her that he didn't need a wand, but the infuriating woman wouldn't budge. She had told him that Dumbledore had told her to get all his supplies for school and they were going to get all his supplies.

Ollivander appeared suddenly out of the back area of his shop and caught sight of McGonagall. "Minerva McGonagall. Eleven inches and hair from a sphinx, correct?"

"Yes, Mr. Ollivander," McGonagall agreed, used to his method of identifying people by the wands he'd sold them. "We are here to get a new wand for Mr. Potter."

Ollivander looked around for the young man and found him standing in the corner in the shadows. His lips quirked in a smile at the words on the t-shirt the boy was wearing: "Never underestimate the power of stupid people in large groups." It was a sentiment he agreed with, especially these days.

He'd been around a long time. With their current prejudices against any they considered non-human, he was glad that the last wizard who had known what he was had died a thousand years ago. During his lifetime he had seen the rise of wizard kind and was now living through its rather rocky decline. He didn't know what had caused the situation, but wizarding kind thought they were at the pinnacle of development, but they weren't. There hadn't been any real change here for over two hundred years. The wizarding world was currently stagnant. If they were going to survive, then what the wizarding world needed was something or someone to jumpstart another period of growth. What he did know, having lived through the rise and fall of several civilizations, was that if nothing happened to change the situation, then one day, probably within the next couple of hundred years, then the wizarding world would disappear forever.

Who knows, he mused, maybe the catalyst for change will be young Mr. Potter.

Bringing his mind back to business at hand, Ollivander commented. "I was expecting to see you last month Mr. Potter."

"I didn't see the need to get a new wand." Harry told the wandmaker. "I tried to explain to Professor McGonagall that I no longer needed one, but she wouldn't listen." He looked up at the ceiling and muttered loud enough to be heard, "not that she ever does listen to anything I have to say."

"I always listen to what you have to say, Mr. Potter." McGonagall replied through gritted teeth.

"You may hear it, but you either don't listen, or you don't believe it." Harry countered.

"Name one time, you told me something that I didn't listen to or believe." McGonagall challenged him.

Harry took up the challenge. "First year, I and two others who shall remain nameless, told you that someone was going to go after the Philosopher's Stone the day Dumbledore was sent off on that wild goose chase to the Ministry. I believe you told us something along the lines of: 'rest assured the stone is too well protected, no one can possibly steal it' and when I kept insisting, you said 'I know what I'm talking about.' You even threatened to take points from Gryffindor, when we were trying to protect the stone. And what happened later that night? Someone did make a try for the stone and if it hadn't been for me, Quirrell or should I say Voldemort would have had the stone. The protections you had in place a first year could get past, or rather three of us did. If they were that strong and that impenetrable, then we shouldn't have been able to get past even the first of them. But that wouldn't have suited Dumbledore's purpose which was to mould me into the perfect weapon to take out Voldemort, now would it."

McGonagall stood there speechless for several moments as Harry marked off one point in the air. "How dare you accuse the Headmaster of trying to harm you? He has always done his very best to try and protect you and all the other students at Hogwarts!"

“Reeeeeaaaallllyyy,” Harry drew the word out, the sarcasm very evident in his voice. “His very best included hiring at least two incompetent teachers for Defence Against the Dark Arts. There may have been more, but I can only count the years I was there. Allowing two, count them, two followers of Voldemort free access to Hogwarts and no I am not counting Snape in that group, though I should. Forcing a fourth year student to compete in a competition that was clearly meant for seventh year or higher students. Allowing a Ministry employee who was masquerading as a teacher to torture his students without making any moves to stop it and neither did you come to think of it. Allowing me to be condemned to Azkaban without a fair trial. And wait, I saved the best for last. Dumbledore, who was the executor of my parents’ will, violated the terms of it, by placing me with the Dursleys. If that is the very best that Albus Dumbledork can do, then god help us when he does his worst.”

“What do you mean he violated your parents will?” McGonagall couldn’t believe the venom she was hearing from the young man she thought she had known so well. She was also so surprised by Potter’s litany of the Headmaster’s supposed crimes that she completely missed the insulting name that he had given to Dumbledore.

“That’s none of your business, ma’am. I will deal with Dumbledore on that matter in due course.” Harry told her. “I believe we are here to prove why I don’t need a wand so that you can return to your school and I can be returned to my prison.”

Ollivander, who had been watching the argument with interest, suddenly realized they had both returned their attention to him. “Oh yes, of course, Mr. Potter. Now as I understand it, you can now perform wandless magic, is that correct?”

“Yes.”

“Do you have to make the movements as if you were holding a wand when you do the wandless magic?” Ollivander asked. “Do you have to say the incantations?”

"It's not really necessary." Harry told him. "I sometimes do make gestures though that's probably out of habit and those aren't necessarily the ones that went with the spell."

Ollivander nodded, "then you are quite correct, Mr. Potter, you can no longer use a wand. No single wand core would be strong enough to channel and enhance your magic at the level you are capable of working at. You would burn out the core of any wand you handled. You will need a staff."

"A staff!" McGonagall stared at the wandmaker in surprise. There hadn't been a wizard who required a staff since the time of Merlin! Even the Founders of Hogwarts who were the strongest wizards and witches of their age had used wands!

"What's the difference between a staff and a wand other than size, I mean?" Harry couldn't help being curious.

"A staff can have up to ten different cores in it, each selected by the wizard who will be using it. No two staffs are ever exactly the same and no staff will work well for another wizard, unless it is passed on before the current wizard's death, using a blood ritual. Usually what will happen is the staff is buried with the wizard who used it." Ollivander told him.

"Then it would be a waste of your talents to make one for me, Mr. Ollivander, since I do not intend to remain in the wizarding world once this year is up." Harry informed the wandmaker.

"I'm sorry to hear that Mr. Potter." Ollivander was sincere and Harry could tell that he meant it.

"Well, you're probably only one of about a handful." Harry observed. "Personally I think they'll be glad to see the back of me, that way they don't have to be constantly reminded of their stupidity and their narrow-mindedness. Tell me something, Mr. Ollivander. Did you believe I killed Neville Longbottom?"

"I'm sorry to say, that I never decided one way or the other." Ollivander told him honestly. "I tend to want to hear both sides of a

issue before forming an opinion. The only side of that I ever heard was the Ministry's and that was undoubtedly slanted to make them look good. I will say this much. There were many unanswered questions, at least in my mind that left me in doubt about your guilt. And as you've experienced first hand the Ministry is very quick to assume guilt and about not bothering to take the time to find out if they have the right person or not. You are not the first they have condemned who was innocent and I doubt that you will be the last. I know for a fact that during the time of Grindelwald, they sentenced a wizard to be Kissed and only found out after the man had been Kissed that he was in fact innocent. That left three children orphaned and the Ministry did nothing to correct their mistake. Because of their actions, the oldest boy became one of Voldemort's staunchest followers until he was killed, and the two girls disappeared while they were still very young and to this day, I do not know what happened to them. You would have thought the Ministry would have learned a lesson from that to use all the tools at their disposal to determine guilt or innocence, but they haven't."

"Well, I thank you for your honesty sir." Harry bowed his head slightly in the direction of the other man, before turning his attention back to McGonagall. "Are we now done, Professor?"

"No, Mr. Potter, we are not done." McGonagall told him firmly. "We came here to get you your wand, but since you will need a staff, then a staff is what we will get."

"Oh and just who is going to teach me how to use it?" Harry sneered. "You? Professor Flitwick perhaps?" He paused then added, "Oh I know, how about the great Albus Dumbledore himself?"

McGonagall heard the insulting name this time "Mr. Potter, I must insist that you show the Headmaster some respect."

"My respect was freely given the first time around to both you and the Headmaster." Harry informed her. "This time both you and he will have to earn it back. And I can tell you right now that, if you keep towing the party line you never will."

Harry turned back to Ollivander. "Well Mr. Ollivander, it seems that you will be making a staff for me, since the Deputy Headmistress wants to waste Hogwarts' money."

Ollivander turned to Professor McGonagall and said, "Professor, just so you are aware, a staff takes at least two weeks to create, once the materials have been chosen by the wizard. Mr. Potter will not be leaving with one today. Do you still wish to have one made?"

"May I borrow your fire, Mr. Ollivander?"

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Harry gave the password to the Fat Lady and then stormed up the stairs to the sixth year dorm. Once there he set the trunk down and unshrunk it. He made sure to put a charm on it that would give anyone a nasty curse if they deliberately touched it. Not that he intended to keep anything he valued in there. He'd learned his lesson last year. The things he valued would be kept in the trunk he had shrunk down to the size of a matchbox in his bookbag. He had placed charms on the bookbag and its contents to prevent them from being destroyed and to keep anyone but him from getting into it.

"Potter, you're back." It took Harry a moment to remember this boy's name: Terry Lorrying. He came from a non-wizarding family.

"Brilliant observation, Lorrying." Harry sneered. "I'm heading down for lunch now. You might want to warn the others not to touch my trunk or they'll get a nasty surprise."

"You booby-trapped your trunk. Why?" Lorrying wanted to know.

"Surely your memory can't be that bad?" Harry countered sarcastically. "I have no intention of losing another trunk to the pyromaniacs of Gryffindor."

"Harry," the other boy began.

"Potter." Harry corrected him.

“Potter then,” the other boy tried again. “You have to give us a chance to try and make up for what we did last year.”

“I don’t have to do anything.” Harry interrupted hotly. “You all think that all you have to do is say, ‘I’m sorry’ and all will be forgiven that things will go back to the way they were. Well it’s not going to happen. The Harry Potter, who let people walk all over him, no longer exists. You killed him that day when you burned up his things and condemned him to hell without even bothering to listen to his side of the story. Nothing you do can ever make up for destroying the only memories I had of my parents and my godfather. I will never get those memories back. However, I know from experience that most Gryffindors are too stupid to realise that and will continue to try or do something equally stupid, so why don’t you pass the word to all the other traitors in this tower, that unless it has to do with school, to leave me the hell alone.”

Terry Lorrying watched the older boy leave without giving him a chance to voice any of the arguments he’d come up with over the summer or since seeing him yesterday. He had been shocked when he first saw the article in the Daily Prophet proclaiming Harry Potter’s innocence and the fact that he had defeated Voldemort. At first he had been so relieved to read that Voldemort was dead, but then the knowledge of what he had helped the others do to the saviour of the wizarding world had set in. He had spent most of the next day trying to write a letter to the Boy-Who-Lived to let him know how sorry he was and to thank him for destroying He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. He was just glad he hadn’t sent it when he got a letter from Colin, warning him not to write Harry Potter, because of the nasty hexes he would get back if he did.

Remembering the look of satisfaction on Potter’s face when he saw Colin sporting the words ‘I AM AN IDIOT!’ on his forehead, Terry shivered. It had reminded him a lot of Malfoy. He was beginning to wonder if it might not have been a mistake for Harry Potter to return to Hogwarts.

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McGonagall stared at the report on her desk of Harry's afternoon classes. His determination to make things as difficult for everyone apparently had not changed. So far he had gotten detention from at least three more teachers and Gryffindor was currently in negative points, despite the efforts of Miss Granger and other students. He was currently serving the detention she'd given him, for failure to comply with a teacher's orders, with Filch. She dreaded to think of what the House points for Gryffindor would look like after Potions on Friday.

She shook her head wondering if turning young Potter around was going to be worth all the effort they were going to. A knock on her office door distracted McGonagall from her thoughts. "Come in."

Hermione Granger stepped into the office and closed the door behind her. "You wanted to see me, Professor?"

"Yes, Miss Granger," McGonagall even though she had originally proposed Miss Granger for this task was now having second thoughts about asking her to do it. "I have a task for you, but I want to let you know that you do not have to do it if you don't want to."

Hermione was curious about what could have her favourite teacher so nervous. "What is it ma'am?"

"If you are agreeable, the Headmaster and I would like for you to contact the friends of Mr. Potter's parents and try to get pictures of them so that the album Hagrid gave him his first year can be recreated." McGonagall said quickly.

Hermione was silent for several minutes before she said, "I'm afraid I will have to refuse this assignment, Professor."

"If it would not be prying, may I ask why?"

"I have no desire to be the target of Harry Potter's vengeance. I've found out that he has a mean streak that makes Malfoy look like a wimp by comparison." Hermione told her. "Did you know that in August, he had the Weasleys and I summoned to court at the Ministry?"

When McGonagall shook her head, Hermione continued. "We didn't have to appear before the Wizengamot, but in a smaller court. As the main heir of Sirius Black's estate, he was trying to have several aspects of Sirius' will voided. He apparently hired a very good wizarding solicitor, because he won. Of course that may also have been because the wizard judge, didn't want to do anything to anger Harry. I remember his solicitor saying that based upon the wording of Sirius' will, claiming that we were the friends and family Harry needed while he was growing up had been disproved by our actions at his trial, because real friends and family would have stood by him and not immediately assumed his guilt."

"I'm sorry you had to go through that, Miss Granger." McGonagall told her.

"That wasn't the thing that convinced me to avoid having him angry at me." Hermione told her. "When I got home, there was a box waiting for me. There was a note on the top of it that said that since I found house elves much more worthy to defend than those I called my friends, that I probably wanted the contents. When I opened the box, I found the shrunken heads of the house elves from Grimmauld Place and the freshly decapitated head of Kreacher. It was still bleeding."

"Oh, my dear," McGonagall looked properly horrified. "How could he do such a thing?"

"Now you understand, why I want to avoid drawing his anger, if at all possible." Hermione told her. "Last night he presented me with a sort of truce. He said that as long as I keep any conversations with him to school matters and did not try to interfere in his life, that he will be civil to me." She looked at McGonagall, her expression serious. "It's a start ma'am and I don't want to blow any chance I may have of getting Harry to forgive me."

"I understand, Miss Granger." McGonagall was pleased to hear that there were at least some signs of thawing from Potter.

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By Friday, Harry still had no wand, but he knew he would be receiving a staff from Mr. Ollivander sometime in the next few weeks. Since Dumbledore had given McGonagall the go ahead, Ollivander was making one out of Ash with seven wands cores. Despite the slight looks of awe when they first saw him either because he was the first wizard since Merlin to need a staff, or because he had destroyed Voldemort, Harry had also managed to rack up detention with every teacher but Hagrid and Binns and that beat the Weasel twins record. He hadn't done anything to deliberately disrupt the classes, but he also hadn't done any of the expected work either. He would just sit in the back of the class and stare at the teacher. If things worked out the way he expected, he would have one of the worst grades at Hogwarts for a sixth year, if they didn't expel him first and knowing Dumbledore, they wouldn't do that.

He was looking forward to today's potions class. Since the expected event hadn't happened yet, he thought that Mr. Boet had managed to arrange it so that it happened during his Potions class, so he would be able to witness it first hand. He made a mental note to thank the man when he saw him again.

Harry finished breakfast and headed down to the Potions classroom. He wanted a front row seat for what was going to hopefully happen today.

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Snape swept into the sixth year class, his robes billowing behind him.

This was the class for those who would be taking their NEWTs in potions in their seventh year. This was one of the few classes where there weren't that many students so all four houses could be combined into the one class. There were only about a dozen students in all who had scored the O on their OWLs necessary to get into this class.

"Well, you've made it into the advanced Potions class." Snape began. "How only Merlin himself knows, but now that you are here, let me tell you what I expect from you...."

Whatever Snape had intended to say, was left unsaid because the classroom door slammed open and four men came into the room.

“Severus Augustus Snape?” The one at the front of the group asked.

“Yes.” Snape replied.

“I am Auror Broadmeer.” The man identified himself. “You are under arrest sir. Please come with us, Professor Snape.”

“On what charge?” Snape demanded.

“Assault and rape of the mind of a student, using the Legilimens curse.” Broadmeer said flatly.

Several of the students in the room gasped, while Snape quickly put the pieces together and commented caustically. “Having me arrested on false charges Potter? I would have thought that given your experience of being falsely accused and imprisoned, you wouldn’t have tried the same thing on someone else.”

“They aren’t false charges and you know it, Snape.” Harry pointed out. “And unlike me, you will receive a fair trial.”

“I insist on speaking to the Headmaster, before you haul me off.” Snape told the Aurors.

“We have no problem with that, since he is being charged as an accessory to your crimes.” Broadmeer told him. “We were going to have to stop by and pick him up anyway.”

“Potter, you will come with us.” Snape ordered. “The rest of you, class dismissed.”

Justice May Be Blind....

Harry followed behind Snape and the four Aurors as they headed for Dumbledore's office, wearing a smirk on his face.

Snape had a murderous expression on his face that caused those few students they encountered on the way to the Headmaster's office to scramble frantically out of the way.

Said students became even more confused when they saw Harry Potter following Snape, a huge grin on his face. They quickly scattered, trying to find someone who had been in Potter's sixth year Potions class. They wanted to know what was going on.

Unaware of the curious students he had left in his wake, Snape strode up to gargoyle guarding Dumbledore's office and growled, "Bertie Botts."

The gargoyle moved aside and Snape stalked up the stairs and entered the Headmaster's office without knocking.

"Severus," Dumbledore greeted his Potions Master in surprise. "I thought you had a sixth year potions class right now."

"And I was just starting to teach that class," Snape told him sourly, "but the Aurors behind me decided to interrupt. I am apparently under arrest, thanks to Potter here."

Harry had taken a seat while Snape was talking and Dumbledore saw that the younger wizard was looking very pleased with himself.

"And just what are the charges against Professor Snape?" Dumbledore asked the Aurors.

"Assault and mind rape, using the Legilimens curse." Broadmeor told the Headmaster. "And Headmaster, you are also under arrest as an accessory to his crimes."

"Given what happened to you, Ha..." At the scowl that crossed the younger man's face, Dumbledore quickly changed it to, "Mr. Potter, I

would have thought you would be the last to bring false charges against another. Isn't this carrying revenge a little too far?"

"As I told Snape," Harry began.

"Professor Snape," Dumbledore corrected automatically.

"As I was saying before you interrupted me," Harry countered. "I told Snape, this is justice not revenge. The way I look at it, you and Snape will certainly get far fairer trial than I ever did."

"But it is revenge, Mr. Potter. These false charges of yours could ruin a man's career." Dumbledore sounded disappointed.

"If you had bothered to attend one of those 'remedial' potions lessons you forced me to take with Professor Snape, you would know the charges aren't false." Harry pointed out calmly. "And it seems as though Madame Bones must agree with me. After all she's the one who sent the Aurors to arrest you both. Is that correct, Auror Broadmeer?"

"Yes, Mr. Potter, it is."

"You can't accuse her of being swayed by public opinion, because unlike Fudge, she is not guided by a love of power. My being the so called Destroyer-of-Voldemort and one of the wealthiest wizards in the world, would have no bearing on her decisions, unlike our beloved Minister." Harry reminded Dumbledore. "Only facts matter to that woman. She probably the only one in the Ministry or here at Hogwarts who doesn't have a hidden agenda, with regards to me."

"Headmaster," Auror Broadmeer spoke up before Dumbledore could say anything further. "Would you please come with us? Madame Bones is waiting."

"May I make arrangements for Professor McGonagall to take over during my absence?" Dumbledore requested.

"Yes, sir, you may, but please don't take too long." Broadmeer respected Dumbledore, but only up to a certain point. He knew the

man was sneaky enough to have been in Slytherin and in fact that was the guess he had put into the Ministry pool for which House Dumbledore had been in. So far no one had found the answer to that question.

“Auror Broadmeer, do you need me to come as well?” Harry wanted to know.

“Not today, Mr. Potter.” The Auror told him. “Madame Bones will be sending you a letter by owl to let you what time next week you need to be there for the hearings. I believe she also mentioned something about arranging for an Auror to escort you to the hearings.”

“Ask her please if she could to make sure it is not Auror Tonks who is sent to get me.” Harry requested. “I have no real desire to see her any time soon.”

“I will pass on your request.” Broadmeer assured him.

“I can’t believe this is happening.” Snape finally spoke up. He was unable to understand why Dumbledore wasn’t forcing the boy to admit he was lying. Surely the Headmaster couldn’t feel that much guilt over the brat’s false imprisonment? “You are arresting the Headmaster and a respected Professor of Hogwarts on the word of an arrogant boy?”

“Mr. Potter is seventeen unless I am very much mistaken so he is a man, not a boy.” Auror Broadmeer countered stiffly. “In fact he is acting far more adult at the moment than a certain Potions Master I could name. While am I too old to have had you for Potions, I have heard all about you and your teaching methods from my nephew, Professor Snape. To me, you are not a professor worthy of respect. I can’t help wondering how many dreams you have crushed with your teaching methods and caustic comments, Snape. Jeremy had hopes of following in his grandfather’s footsteps and becoming a Potions Master, but you destroyed that dream, just because you enjoy terrorizing children. So don’t talk to me about arrogance.”

Dumbledore handed the note he had written to the waiting house elf and spoke up before an argument could start between the two men. "I am ready Auror Broadmeer."

"Then shall we go, gentlemen?" Broadmeer gestured toward the door.

Two aurors went out first, followed by Dumbledore and Snape, and bringing up the rear were Harry, Broadmeer, and the remaining aurors.

Since he didn't have to go with them, Harry decided to go to the library to do some research into magical wills.

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McGonagall met the aurors, Snape, and the Headmaster in the entry hall. "Headmaster, I got your note saying I was to be in charge for a while. What is going on?"

"Potter had us arrested." Snape told her sourly.

"On what charges?" McGonagall demanded of the aurors.

"That is none of your business ma'am." The oldest auror told her. "Now if you will please step aside, because we need to bring these gentlemen to Madame Bones."

"I will not step aside, until you tell me why you are taking them away." McGonagall stated firmly.

"You are not directly involved in the case therefore you do not have the right to know." The auror told her just as firmly. "However if you wish to continue to block the way, we will be more than happy to arrest you for preventing an auror from carrying out their duty."

"Minerva," Dumbledore spoke up, "don't worry, this will all get sorted out. I'm certain Amelia will be co-operative and we should be back by tonight. Just take care of the school and students until our return. I'm certain they will be worried because of this and you need to keep them calm."

“Very well, Headmaster,” McGonagall stepped aside.

Once the door closed behind the group of men, McGonagall headed for the Headmaster’s office. As soon as she was settled behind the desk, she called, “Dobby.”

There was a pop then she saw the house elf bouncing in place on the other side of the desk, “Dobby here, Professor McGonagall.”

“Dobby, I need you to find Mr. Potter and tell him I want to see him in the Headmaster’s office as soon as possible.” McGonagall instructed.

“Dobby find,” the house elf promised and popped out.

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The knock on her office door startled Amelia Bones and she spilled tea on some papers and her lap. Even though she was expecting visitors, she hadn’t expected them so soon. After taking a few moments to mop up spilt tea, she called out, “come.”

“Auror Broadmeer, ma’am,” the oldest auror told her. “I have Headmaster Dumbledore and Professor Snape here as requested.”

“Thank you, Auror Broadmeer,” Madame Bones quickly recovered from her surprise. Knowing Dumbledore as she did, she had expected the canny old wizard to try and stall their arrival as long as possible. “Please bring Dumbledore in and escort Professor Snape down to a holding cell.”

“Yes Madame Bones,” he turned to fulfil her orders and then remembered the message that Harry Potter had asked to be passed on. “Ma’am, I also have a message for you from Mr. Potter. He requested that whoever is sent to pick him up for the hearings, that it not be Auror Tonks.”

Madame Bones made a note on her calendar on the date she had scheduled for Snape’s and Umbridge’s hearings for Auror Shacklebolt to pick up Mr. Potter and if he wasn’t available for

Broadmeer to do it. "I have taken care of it. Thank you again Auror Broadmeer."

"Thank you ma'am."

As the Auror left, Dumbledore came in.

"Tea Albus?" Madame Bones asked.

"That would be lovely, Amelia." Dumbledore was relieved to see the evidence of civility. Maybe things weren't as bad as he had envisioned. "I am surprised that Severus is not allowed to join us."

"He is being taken to a holding cell." Amelia told him as she handed him a cup of tea. "I have a few questions to ask you before you join him there."

After taking a sip of his tea, Dumbledore asked, "May I ask what I am being charged with?"

"You are being charged as an accessory to the crime of assault and mind rape by Professor Severus Snape upon the person of Harry James Potter. You may also be charged with negligence with regards to Madame Umbridge's actions during the year she was teaching at Hogwarts." Madame Bones told him. "And until today, if anyone had ever told me I would be arresting Albus Dumbledore for instigating an assault upon one of his students, I would have said they were mad."

There was a pause before Madame Bones looked him in the eye as she asked. "What I want to know is how could you stand by during Mr Potter's fifth year and allow Snape and Umbridge's actions toward the boy to go on unchecked?"

Dumbledore sipped his tea in silence for several minutes, his mind working frantically, trying to figure out what she was talking about. Finally he had to admit, "I'm afraid I do not know anything about the assault you are referring to, Amelia. The only task I assigned Severus outside his normal teaching duties was to teach Harry Occlumency in an effort to try and protect his mind from Voldemort. As for Delores

Umbridge, I know from Minerva that Harry had a lot of detentions with her, but from what I was told she just had him writing lines.”

Madame Bones stared at him in disbelief. “Do you think I’m that gullible, Albus?”

Dumbledore stared at her shocked. What had he said that was wrong?

Madame Bones continued before he could say a word. “I may not know everything about how the wards in and around Hogwarts work, but I do know the Headmaster or Headmistress is linked to them so that they have an early warning system in case of danger. The Sorting Hat links all students into the wards at the time they are Sorted so that if a student is in ‘real’ danger and it’s not just a matter of two students throwing hexes at each other in a fit of anger, he or she is supposed to be alerted. Are you trying to tell me that you knew nothing about the attacks by Snape upon Mr. Potter, or the fact that Delores Umbridge brought an instrument of torture into your school and used it on him and other students as well?”

“What instrument of torture?” Dumbledore growled.

“She brought a Blood Quill into the school and used it upon a minor, several minors in fact. Not only that, but she threatened Mr. Potter with the Cruciatus curse.” Madame Bones told him then asked. “What happened Albus? How could the wards not have told you what she and Snape were doing to that boy?”

Dumbledore looked shocked at hearing that Umbridge had managed to bring a Blood Quill into his school. The wards shouldn’t have missed it. He tried to remember if the wards had gone off during Potter’s fifth year and couldn’t remember any alarms coming from them. There had been a numbers of times the wards had gone off during Potter’s first and second year, and he had largely ignored them unless Mr. Potter had been in danger of losing his life. He thought back trying to remember the last time they had gone off when Mr. Potter or any other student had been in danger and that had been near the end of his third year, when the Dementors had nearly killed him along with the Mr. Weasley and Miss Granger, but the wards had

also told him that a second Harry was out there on the grounds dealing with the situation. That had let him know that he had allowed Miss Granger to tell Harry about her time turner and that they had gone back to fix things.

But they hadn't gone off when Sirius had tried to attack Pettigrew in Ron's bed and that had been a situation where a child had been in danger. Sirius might have easily missed Pettigrew and stabbed Ron and yet there had been no tremor in the wards. Had the fact that he ignored the castle's warnings because he needed to mould Mr. Potter into the warrior/weapon that would destroy Voldemort made Hogwarts think he wasn't interested in knowing about the danger his children were in until it was almost too late to help them? Had he made the castle think it had to take steps to protect the children since he wouldn't? He would have to have a talk with the Hogwarts about keeping secrets from him when he got back.

"Well Albus?" Amelia Bones had gotten tired of silence from the older wizard.

Dumbledore felt embarrassed when he admitted, "I'm sorry Amelia, but the wards never went off. I don't know why they didn't alert me.'

"Could it be because you were so busy trying to mould your weapon, that the castle thought you didn't give a damn about your primary responsibility which was to protect the students of that school?" It seemed as though Madame Bones had guessed the direction of his thoughts quite well.

"In all honesty," Dumbledore looked weary, "I don't know."

Amelia Bones just stared at him not fooled for a moment. "You honest! Oh please, Albus don't make me laugh. You have more secrets than Cornelius Fudge and you hide them better. I don't think you've told the whole truth to anyone in the last hundred years. I'm fairly certain you didn't tell the Wizengamot the whole truth about why you wanted to force Potter to go back to Hogwarts, but we did agree with the few valid reasons you did give which is why we enacted that legislation for you."

“So what happens now?” Dumbledore asked her.

“If you are done with your tea, you will join Professor Snape in a holding cell.” Madame Bones told him. “Do you wish me to owl your solicitor?”

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“Professor McGonagall, Dobby said you wanted to see me.” Harry stood in the doorway of the Headmaster’s office a blank expression on his face.

“Come in, Mr. Potter.” She ordered. “Have a seat.”

“I’ll stand ma’am.” Harry told her as he went over to look out the window. “What did you wish to see me about? I was involved in some research in the Library, since I wound up with an unexpected free period.”

McGonagall just stared at him. “Come now, Mr. Potter, I don’t think it was quite as unexpected as you are making it sound. At least I doubt it was for you.”

Harry shrugged. “I knew it was coming. I just didn’t know when.”

“Why did you have Professor Snape and the Headmaster arrested?” McGonagall wanted to know. Remembering his comment at Ollivander’s she asked. “Is this how you planned to get the Headmaster back? Are you going to be having us all arrested?”

“No.” Harry shook his head. “I said I would deal with Dumbledork in my own good time. You should also be aware that sometime within the next week an Auror will probably come to take me to Snape’s hearing and if they’ve arrested Umbridge, probably hers as well. As to last question, professor haven’t you been told that thinking someone is out to get you is the first sign of paranoia? You’ll end up like Moody, if you aren’t careful.”

“I think I could be somewhat justified in my belief, given what I am told you sent to Miss Granger.” McGonagall countered dryly.

“Oh,” Harry smiled. “She got her present. I am glad.” At the concerned expression on McGonagall’s face, he asked, “Are you telling me she didn’t like her gift and after all the thought I put into finding just the right thing to let her know how much her friendship meant to me? I mean I know how much more she cares about house elves and other non-humans than her supposed friends, so I thought it would be the perfect present.”

“I doubt anyone would appreciate receiving a box of decapitated house elf heads as a gift, Mr. Potter.” McGonagall pointed out. “Especially if one of them is still bleeding. I think it made her afraid she might be next.”

Harry shook his head again. “That wasn’t my intent at all. I know how worried she is about the house elves and wants them to have equal rights with wizards so I thought she would appreciate having these to take care of. Like I said, I know she is far more concerned with their welfare than with the welfare of her human friends. And after all the trouble I went to make sure they got there, she still didn’t appreciate the gesture.” He lowered his voice slightly as if he were sharing a secret. “I had to take a lot of care with the package before giving it to the postman, because he might not have delivered it, especially if he knew what was in it.”

McGonagall realising she wasn’t going to get anywhere else on this topic, returned to the reason she’d requested he join her. “What charges were brought against Professor Snape and the Headmaster?”

“Professor Snape was arrested on charges of mind rape and assault.” Harry reported flatly. “Dumbledore was arrested as an accessory, probably because he allowed Snape to do what he wanted to me unmonitored, even though he knew the bastard hated me because of my father.”

“Potter!” McGonagall snapped at him. “All of your teachers have told you they will not stand for you speaking about them and to them in such a disrespectful manner.”

Harry's face was an expressionless mask. "And the last time you said that, I told you that the first time around my respect was freely given. This time it will have to be earned. Was there anything else ma'am?"

"Yes, there is the matter of your detentions." McGonagall remembered the complaints from the teachers who had assigned him detention. "You haven't shown up for any but the first and after that one, Mr. Filch said he would not oversee any more of your detentions."

Harry smiled at the memory her words conjured up.

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Flashback

Trophy Room

Filch and Ms. Norris were waiting for Professor McGonagall to bring Mr. Potter down for his detention. He had purposely allowed Peeves to mess up the room as long as nothing was irreparably damaged, just to give the arrogant brat some real work to do.

"Potter, you will be serving your detention with Mr. Filch." McGonagall told him as she left him at the doorway to the trophy room.

"Get in there, boy." Filch ordered, once the teacher was gone. "Your job is to clean this room until it is spotless, without using your wand to clean it. I'll be back in an hour, so you'd better get started."

Harry didn't move.

"Get a move on, boy," Filch ordered. "You have to have it all done by curfew and that's in an hour."

"It's already done." Harry countered, leaning back against the wall outside the doorway. "Hard work it was too."

Filch grabbed the young man by the arm and prepared to drag him into the trophy room only to stand there stunned in amazement as he looked at the now empty room.

“What did you do, boy?” the caretaker growled.

“I’m going to give you this warning only once, Filch.” Harry told him, his eyes filled with icy fire. “Do not ever call me boy again. I promise, you will not like the results.”

“What did you do?” Filch shrieked.

“Calm down, Filchie.” Harry patted the man on the back. “I just did exactly what you told me to do. The room is now spotless. And I didn’t use a wand to do it either.”

“Put them back.” Filch growled.

“Now why would you want me to do that?” Harry gave him a confused look. “I thought you’d be happy. Especially since I went to all the trouble of making sure you’ll never have to clean this room again.”

“Put everything back the way it was.” Filch demanded. “Or I’ll make sure you are expelled.”

“You know Filchie, that threat only works if someone really cares about staying here.” Harry told him. “Your threats are meaningless, because I really didn’t want to come back here in the first place. You have no power over me because there is nothing you can threaten me with that will make me do what you want. Not to mention the fact that Dumbledore wants me here, so he won’t expel me. If you want those stupid trinkets back, I suggested you ask me nicely.”

Looking at the implacable expression on the boy’s face, Filch knew he had lost and that if he wanted the items he was responsible for back he was going to have to do what he really didn’t want to do. “Please, Mr. Potter, put the trophies and their cases back where they belong.”

Harry clapped the caretaker on the back. “See that wasn’t so hard.” He gestured toward the trophy room. “There they are and I even cleaned off what Peeves did to them.” As he turned to leave, he

added, “not very nice of you by the way allowing Peeves make an even bigger mess in there.”

End Flashback

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Pleased that Filch was still cowed by what he had done, Harry said, “So, I didn’t ask to be given any of them any way.”

“You earned those detentions by not being prepared or participating in class.” McGonagall pointed out. “You are obligated to take the punishment you have earned.”

“If I accepted those detentions, that would imply that I wanted to be here and that you had a right to punish me because of my failures. We both know that I don’t want to be here.” Harry countered.

“That’s the second time you’ve said you didn’t want to be here.” McGonagall commented. “If that is the case, then why did you even bother to come?”

“To avoid being a victim of the Wizarding World’s double standards... again.” Harry told her stiffly.

“What double standard are you talking about?” McGonagall inquired.

“The Imperious Curse is an Unforgivable right?”

“Yes,” she couldn’t see where this was leading.

“And yet the adults of the wizarding world think nothing of subjecting their children to it.” Harry told her.

McGonagall got to her feet and stiffly demanded. “What are you talking about? We have never used the Imperious curse on our children! That would be unthinkable!”

“And just what would you call the spell that forces a child to return somewhere they in their heart of hearts do not wish to go?” Harry

wanted to know. "I know all about the spell that is placed on a child the minute they step foot on school grounds as part of the magically binding contract that insures they come back every year, even if they may not want to. As I told Dumbledore the effect of the spell is forcing a child not to change its mind, and that makes it just like the Imperious curse."

McGonagall stared at the young man across from her stunned. Did he really have no concept of how important it was for a child to finish their magical education?

Before she could come up with a suitable response, Harry said, "Are we done ma'am? I do need to get to my next class. Don't want to rack up another detention for being late now do I?"

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By dinner that evening, nearly everyone at Hogwarts had heard about Snape and Dumbledore's arrest.

The teachers were all giving Harry dark looks, even Hagrid. The student's reactions varied, depending on their house.

Granger spent most of dinnertime glaring at him, but said nothing. Harry had been grateful for the fact that Granger's looks and thoughts couldn't kill, or else he'd be six feet under right now.

He also briefly admired her restraint. He was certain she wanted to verbally rip him apart for having one of her hero's arrested and the only thing stopping her was her fear of provoking him. He couldn't help wondering if she would be this restrained when she saw what he had in mind for McGonagall and the other Heads of House.

The Weasels had also settled for giving him dark looks and muttering to their friends and cohorts. Maybe there was hope for the older Weasel, his former friend. After a moment's consideration of that idea, Harry decided it wasn't the case. It was far more likely that his companions were restraining him to keep him from doing anything stupid. A pity, he sighed. He would have enjoyed turning the idiot into a ferret like Malfoy had been during their fourth year. It was a

member of the weasel family after all.

Other Gryffindors along with some of the Hufflepuffs showed less restraint. They would come up and congratulate him on having Snape arrested and in the next breath be blasting him for having Dumbledore arrested.

The Ravenclaws with the exception of Luna left him alone. She came over to congratulate him on a well thought out strategy that took out two with one very legal strike.

The Slytherins on the other hand were the exact opposite to the Gryffindors. They were pleased that Dumbledore had been arrested, but were very angry that Snape had been too and on a more serious charge.

For the most part Harry ignored them all, except when they began to threaten to hex him. He would take his attention from the book he was reading and give them an icy stare that some of the younger Gryffindors would later swear was worse than Snape's. After a few moments under that icy gaze the student in question quickly found someone else to talk to or somewhere else to be.

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Harry spent a large part of the weekend in the library researching the legal wizarding terms that made up a large part of his parents will. There were clauses and sub-clauses he needed to sort out among other things. He wanted to make sure he had all his wizards in a row before he started knocking them over.

Not that any of the other students who had wandered over to see what he was doing in the out of the way corner of the library would know what he was working on. He had cast a glamour charm on the books and papers so that anyone who came by would think he was working on his assignments for class. Hermione had even come by once and smiled when she saw him hard at work. The way she hurried off, he was certain that she was going to report to McGonagall

that Potter was doing the homework for his classes... finally. Wouldn't she and Granger be in for a rude surprise on Monday?

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On Wednesday at 8 am, Auror Shacklebolt entered the Great Hall and was largely ignored as he went up to speak with McGonagall. After a few moments conversation, the Deputy Headmistress tapped the side of her glass to get the attention of the students.

"Miss Granger, Mr. Potter, please accompany Auror Shacklebolt to the Ministry." She instructed the two Gryffindors.

Having received letters from the Ministry on Monday, both of them had known to expect the arrival of an Auror. Hermione had spent most of the morning glaring at Harry, because he wasn't properly dressed for appearing at a court hearing. He was wearing jeans and another one of those attitude t-shirts. This one said: 'I can only please one person a day and today's not your day. Tomorrow's not looking to good either.' At least it was better than the t-shirt he had originally intended to wear: 'Your village called. They want their idiot back.' She had told him that was the wrong message to send to the Ministry and the court, if he really wanted to get Umbridge put away and suggested he wear his school uniform. Harry had said nothing as he went back upstairs and when he came back down, she gave up trying to convince him he was representing the school today. The message on the t-shirt was quite clearly directed at her as was the warning he had given her with his icy stare that she was overstepping the agreed upon boundaries.

As Shacklebolt led the two silent students out of the Great Hall, Harry had to admire the man's poker face. He couldn't tell from the dark man's expression what his thoughts were about the fact that the Head of the Order he also worked for was going to be on trial today.

Once they reached the entry hall he pulled out a flat metal disk and told them. "The portkey is set to take us to a waiting room off of Courtroom One.

Hermione winced. That had been the courtroom where Harry had taken away all the books she had been given by Sirius and the Weasleys had been forced to give up the funds that Sirius had left to them for taking care of Harry when he couldn't.

Kingsley continued having missed her reaction, "The trial for Madame Umbridge will begin in an hour and after it is over, I will be bringing you back to Hogwarts Miss Granger. Mr. Potter, you will be remaining for Professor Snape and Headmaster Dumbledore's trial later this afternoon."

"Will Mr. Boet be meeting me there?" Harry wanted to know.

"He is already there waiting for you." Shacklebolt told him. Gesturing to the disk he told them, "Take hold of it."

When they had done so, he touched it with his wand and said, "Portus."

Harry stumbled slightly as the port key deposited them in the waiting room.

Mr. Boet greeted him as soon as he had recovered his balance. "Good morning, Mr. Potter."

"Mr. Boet," Harry nodded to the other man.

"Has Auror Shacklebolt advised you of the order of the proceedings?" Boet wanted to know.

"He said that Umbitch," Harry ignored Granger's gasp of surprise at the fact that he changed Umbridge's name to a swear word, "will be first and then Snape and Dumbledore this afternoon."

Mr. Boet nodded, then told his client, "Once we finish with the Umbridge hearing, I thought we might speak about that information you requested last week."

"We can discuss it over lunch, if that's all right." Harry told him.

“That will be fine. We can go to a muggle restaurant. We’ll have some privacy there.” Mr. Boet told him. “I also have some papers here I need you to look over for the Remus Lupin Foundation.”

Overhearing this, Hermione asked, “What Remus Lupin Foundation?”

Harry glared at her. “Not that it’s any of your business what I discuss with my solicitor, Miss Know-It-All, but it is the foundation I set up for werewolves in Remus’ name. Now go away you nosy busybody.”

Hermione felt her eyes begin to tear up, but quickly wiped them away determined not to show any weakness. She had only herself to blame. He had set the limits and twice now she had stepped over them and invaded his personal life. Sitting down in one of the available chairs, Hermione did her best to ignore the conversation going on between Harry and his solicitor, even though she really wanted to put her two pence in.

It used to be her advice that he would ask for and trust, but now he didn’t even want it offered and that hurt. Unfortunately as her mother had pointed out to her when she’d heard what had happened, Hermione knew she had no one but herself to blame for the fact that one of her best friends now wanted nothing to do with her. She should have known better. She shouldn’t have been so quick to believe Professor Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall when they said he was guilty, but for some reason, she always believed in the judgement of those in authority unless they proved to be a real danger to the public like Fudge. She had taken their claims as truth without even a second thought and in her anger at what she thought was his betrayal of his friends had done the unthinkable, in destroying the only memories Harry had ever had of his parents. She had been the betrayer not him. She was determined to make up for it, somehow. She was going to get her friend back.

Hermione was so lost in her thoughts that she never noticed Kingsley Shacklebolt come back into the waiting room, until he said. “It’s time to go in.”

The courtroom looked almost the same as it had when she and the Weasleys had been summoned here regarding the reversal of

aspects of Sirius' will. In fact if she hadn't know better, Hermione would have thought it was a muggle courtroom. The only difference was that instead of the one seat for the judge, there were now three seats behind a long table, with one off to the side for the court scribe. At least this one wasn't as gloomy as the dungeon that Fudge had tried Harry in during their fifth year, when he was trying to show Harry and the Wizarding world just who was in power.

Hermione watched as Harry and his solicitor took their places at one of the tables. She noticed that Umbridge and her solicitor were already at the other one.

Hermione noted with some satisfaction that Umbridge didn't look nearly as confident as she had when she used the power of the Ministry to try and control the staff and students of Hogwarts.

She also saw with some surprise that Fudge was in the courtroom. She had thought this hearing was to be a closed to the public. Hermione was pleased to see though that he wasn't seated up in the area where the tribunal would sit and guessed he was just here as an observer. He was seated in the area behind Umbridge and his fingers were moving nervously over the rim of his bowler hat. Hermione was willing to bet the incompetent Minister was here to find out how much damage control he was going to have to do once the truth of Umbridge's crimes came out. Hermione glanced around the room and didn't see anyone else there, but she didn't take that at face value. Knowing that Rita Skeeter was a bug animagus, Hermione was willing to bet there was someone she couldn't see in the room.

As Hermione took a seat in the row behind Harry, Madame Bones along with two elderly witches and wizard and a young blond witch entered the courtroom. Hermione assumed the younger witch was the court scribe and not a member of the Wizengamot.

As soon as the tribunal was seated, Madame Bones began. "This hearing is called to review the charges that have been filed by Harry James Potter regarding the actions of Senior Under-Secretary Delores Umbridge, both before and during the time she was the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher during Mr. Potter's fifth year. The tribunal today is composed of Wizengamot members Gwendolyn

Hill, Alisha Postern, and Martin Bellacote. Interrogator will be Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, Amelia Bones. And Court Scribe, Marion Glendowling.”

Looking at the assembled group in front of her, Madame Bones went on. “Are you Delores Umbridge of 15 Compton Mews in Stoughton-on-the-Thames?”

“Yes,” Umbridge confirmed her identity.

Looking in Harry’s direction, Madame Bones asked, “Are you Mr Harry James Potter of #4 Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey?”

“As of right now, yes.” Harry confirmed.

Madame Bones looked at Hermione. “Are you Miss Hermione Granger of 35 Parkhurst Terrace Seven Oaks?”

“Yes,” Hermione nodded.

“Also present are Minister Fudge, solicitor for Madame Umbridge; Mr. Graham Merkson, and solicitor for Mr. Harry James Potter; Mr. Alexander Boet. You do remember, Minister, that you agreed not to say one word during this hearing? You are here strictly here as an observer nothing more.” The glare Madame Bones gave Fudge as she said this had the Minister squirming like an errant schoolboy. “All required parties appear to be present. Since there are a number of charges to deal with, we will be taking one at a time. Miss Glendowling, please read the first charge.”

The court scribe read from the parchment in front of her. “On August 2, 1996, Delores Umbridge, then an employee of the Ministry of Magic, did send two Dementors to Little Whinging, Surrey with the intent of having them murder Mr. Harry James Potter by means of the Kiss.”

Once the court scribe finished reading the first charge, Madame Bones asked. “Did you Madame Umbridge order two Dementors to attack the person of Harry James Potter in Little Whinging Surrey on August 2, 1996?”

"If you remember at that hearing we were never able to satisfactorily prove that Mr. Potter was even attacked by Dementors." Umbridge told her smugly.

"Based on the eyewitness testimony of the squib Mrs Arabella Figg, it was confirmed that there were Dementors in the area. We just never found out who sent them." Bones reminded her. "If you will recall the hearing was terminated by Minister Fudge when he found out he would not be able to expel Mr. Potter for using magic to defend himself and his cousin."

"So Umbridge, are you saying you did not send the Dementors to Surrey?" The elderly witch sitting to the right of Madame Bones asked the question again.

"I believe she has answered that question, Madame Hill." Umbridge's solicitor spoke up.

"I didn't ask you, young man." Madame Gwendolyn Hill sounded exactly like a crotchety old woman should as she berated the solicitor. "I asked Umbridge and she hasn't answered it. She evaded the question."

"No ma'am, I did not." Umbridge told her.

"We shall see," Madame Bones countered. "Miss Hermione Granger, according to information provided to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, you were present the evening that then Headmistress Umbridge admitted to sending the Dementors after Mr. Potter, is that correct?"

Standing up, Hermione said, "Yes Madame Bones, I was."

"Would you please tell this tribunal what you heard Headmistress Umbridge say?" Madame Bones requested.

Hermione took a deep breath wanting to make sure she had it right. "She said that what the Minister didn't know wouldn't hurt him. She said that he never knew that she had sent the Dementors after Harry,

but that he was delighted to be given the chance to expel him all the same.”

A quick glance at Fudge showed he was shocked by Umbridge’s reasoning. She didn’t know why he should be shocked given that he had spent Harry’s entire fifth year up until the moment Voldemort had gotten in his face trying to discredit Harry.

“Did she by any chance say why she sent the Dementors after Mr. Potter?” The elderly wizard Martin Bellacote wanted to know.

“She said it was because somebody had to act.” Hermione responded. “She said they were all bleating about silencing or discrediting Harry somehow and that she was the only one who actually did something about it.”

Hermione noted with some satisfaction, that Fudge and Umbridge’s faces had gone pasty white for a moment, but they quickly recovered.

“Surely, Madame Bones,” Mr. Merkson inquired obsequiously, “you are not going to take the word of a child over the Undersecretary to the Minister are you? She is one of Mr. Potter’s best friends after all.”

“That is no longer the case,” Mr. Boet spoke up, unintentionally sending Hermione’s hopes for regaining Harry’s friendship plunging to the ground, “and hasn’t been since the trial that sent Mr. Potter to Azkaban on false charges.”

“Perhaps she hopes to regain Mr. Potter’s friendship, by telling lies that would get a woman, Mr. Potter clearly hates, imprisoned?” Mr. Merkson pointed out. “I mean given that Mr. Potter was imprisoned at least partly because of her testimony, this will not be the first time she would have lied before the Wizengamot.”

“Given that he was falsely convicted and imprisoned, Mr. Potter wouldn’t have another person imprisoned on false charges, even if it is someone he hates and even though there are no longer Dementors at Azkaban to give them the same experience he had there.” Mr Boet countered.

"I will take veritaserum if necessary to prove what I am saying is true." Hermione offered. "Can Madame Umbridge say that she will do the same?"

There was silence from both Umbridge and her solicitor. Hermione resumed her seat feeling vindicated.

Bones ordered, "Read the next charge Miss Glendowling."

The scribe moved on to the next charge. "As the Ministry appointed Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, Miss Delores Umbridge deliberately provided sub-standard teaching that if it continued would have put the students graduating from Hogwarts in danger and left them unable to defend themselves and their families from the Dark Lord...." there was a momentary hesitation before the scribe said, "Voldemort."

This to Hermione was a very serious charge. She hated poor teaching with a passion and while Hogwarts had had a succession of Defence teachers during her time there, none of them had ever been as bad as Umbridge, not even Lockhart, who after a year with Lupin as teacher, she had finally conceded hadn't been the best teacher they could have had. But even he hadn't done as much harm as Umbridge had to the lower year classes.

"Hem, hem," Umbridge made that annoying sound she made just before she was going to say something pompous. "That is what Aurors are for, to defend the Wizarding public."

"Oh and I thought they were to defend and protect the Minister only." Harry countered. "He certainly kept enough about him whenever he was in public after he finally admitted to Voldemort's return. Not that he was in any real danger from Voldemort, given that he was inept and pretty useless."

"Mr. Potter," Madame Bones rebuked him. "Please refrain from making comments like that at this hearing. Minister Fudge is having a hard enough time keeping silent as it is."

Both Harry and Hermione looked over and saw the Minister was red faced and appeared to be biting his lips in order to keep from saying something he might regret.

"Yes ma'am," Harry nodded. He really didn't want to get the pompous little man started, even if he would enjoy seeing what Madame Bones did to him for breaking his promise. Then he asked something that had been puzzling him about Umbitch's behaviour. "What really surprises me, ma'am is that Umbridge is sitting there so calmly. I would have expected her to be foaming at the mouth in paranoia by now. How did you manage that?"

"She was given three calming draughts before the hearing began." Madame Bones told him. "The draughts don't interfere with her ability to mount a defence, but they have kept her hysterics down."

Harry smiled at the thought of Umbitch tranquillised like a patient in a mental ward.

Returning to the matter before them, Madame Bones asked. "Did you deliberately provide sub-standard teaching to the students at Hogwarts?"

"I think you will find from the records," Umbridge said proudly, "that year I taught saw a number of the students who got the highest scores ever in the history of Hogwarts on their Defence OWLs and NEWTs. I think that proves I was anything but an incompetent teacher. It also proves that I was not teaching sub-standard classes."

"Given that all you had them doing was reading out of books and no practical spellwork, how do you account for the high grades that the fifth and seventh year students received?" Madame Bones wanted to know.

Again looking smug, Umbridge said, "It just goes to show that with superior materials, a student can learn what is needed without having to practice the spells ahead of time. It also goes to show that a Ministry appointed teacher did far better than all the teachers chosen by Albus Dumbledore. I mean he hired a werewolf to teach the

students, that just shows you the level of incompetence of the previous teachers.”

As Hermione stared at the idiotic woman in disbelief, she heard loud snort from Harry.

“You disagree with Madame Umbridge’s assessment of why you and your fellow students did so well on your OWLs, Mr. Potter?” The other elderly witch on the tribunal, Madame Amelia Postern asked.

“Yes ma’am I do.” Harry told her. “First of all Remus Lupin was an excellent teacher for Defence Against the Dark Arts. I did some checking and prior to my fifth year, the fifth and seventh year students he taught, all scored the best on their OWLs and NEWTs even if they did not have scores as high as we did. As for my fifth year, I have a list of the members of the Defence Association, a study group we formed because of Umbridge’s incompetent teaching skills, and I’m willing to bet that if you check every single member of the DA is one of the students who scored high on either the Defence OWLs, NEWTs, or with their regular end of year defence exams. Those who did poorly, which included most of the Slytherins, all relied on what they learned in Umbridge’s classes. And other than exposure to her prejudice against half-breeds and other ‘non-human’ creatures,” Harry made the gesture for quotes in the air when he said the words non-human, “I doubt that anybody learned anything useful from that woman. And I dread to think of what might have happened if that woman had managed to last more than a year as Defence teacher. Why in few years we might have had Aurors who couldn’t fight their way out of paper bags.” Then he was heard muttering, “not that they’re much better now.”

“And we all know your opinion of those in authority, don’t we Mr. Potter?” Mr. Merkson spoke up quickly. “You have quite a history of detentions and rule breaking, don’t you?”

“Mr. Potter isn’t the one on trial, Merkson.” Mr Boet pointed out. “He is the victim here, not Umbridge.”

“How do we know that for sure? After all it is only his word against Madame Umbridge’s on all of these charges and he does have a

well-documented history of lying and rule breaking. He even admitted to this court just now that he had a study group in violation of Ministry edicts.” Merkson retorted.

“Are you referring to the time when, at the Minister’s instigation,” Harry glared at Fudge as he said this, “the Daily Prophet was calling me a liar because I claimed that Voldemort had returned?” Harry shook his head as everyone but he, Granger, and Mr. Boet flinched again at the mention of the former Dark Lord’s name. “Well we know who was telling the truth there now don’t we? And it is not just my word on some of the more serious charges. You heard Miss Granger testify that Umbridge admitted to sending the Dementors after me.”

“Gentlemen,” Madame Bones interrupted. “Can we get back to the matter at hand? Mr. Merkson, Mr. Boet is quite correct. Mr. Potter is not the one on trial here, your client is. We still have several more charges that we need to get through. Mr. Potter, I would appreciate that list so we can check it.”

Harry nodded and with a slight wave of his hand a paper flew from the table he was sitting at to land in front of Madame Bones.

“Next charge please, Miss Glendowling.” Madame Bones instructed.

“It is charged,” Glendowling read the next charge. “That Madame Umbridge brought into Hogwarts a forbidden Dark item known as a Blood Quill and used it on the students.”

“As a Ministry employee, you know it is a capital offence to even have, let alone use a Blood Quill on another human being.” Bones stared intently at the woman. “Did you bring a Blood Quill into Hogwarts and use it on the students?”

“I know very well what items are and are not allowed into Hogwarts and I brought no forbidden items into Hogwarts. Nor did I use them on any human beings” Umbridge told her.

“Interesting dance around the truth,” Harry observed. “If a Blood Quill is not specifically listed as a forbidden item at Hogwarts, then you told the truth, but given that the Blood Quill has been a banned item in the

wizarding community for almost two hundred years, you still possessed something you should not have had and violated the law by using it and if the back of my hand is not proof of that, then there are several other students, I'm sure could be brought in here to testify to your use of it on them."

"May we see your hand?" Martin Bellacote requested pulling out his wand.

Harry stepped up to the tribunal's table and presented his hand for their examination. The words 'I must not tell lies' were clearly visible as scars on the back of his hand.

The wizard touched his wand to the back of Harry's hand and muttered, "Suggero Malum Radix."

An image of a quill floated up high enough for everyone to see, and Hermione was pleased to see that Umbridge's face paled slightly.

"The scars on the back of Mr. Potter's hand were caused by a Blood Quill," Bellacote concluded. "You do know the law don't you Madame Umbridge? Because a Blood Quill is considered an instrument of torture, the penalty is an automatic twenty years in Azkaban for each time the Quill is used on a witch or wizard."

"It hasn't yet been proven that Madame Umbridge brought the Blood quill to Hogwarts let alone used it on any students there." Her solicitor pointed out.

"How many times do you claim that Madame Umbridge used the Blood Quill on you, Mr. Potter?" Madame Postern asked.

"I lost count," Harry admitted, "but it was at least two or three times a week for at least six months. She had me writing lines with the quill for sometimes up to four hours." Harry told her. "Personally, I think it was kind of a high price for not giving into the pressure that toad was trying to apply."

"I quite agree." The elderly witch looked at Umbridge a severe expression on her face. "You do realise Madame that even you are

cleared on the other charges but aren't on this one, you can look forward to nine hundred and sixty-six years in Azkaban, just for the harm done to Mr. Potter."

"It hasn't yet been proven that Madame Umbridge brought a Blood Quill to Hogwarts or used one on the students." Merkson repeated.

"Quite true," Madame Bones agreed, causing Umbridge to look relieved, until she added. "It hasn't been proven... yet. Come here Mr. Potter."

Harry came to stand in front of Madame Bones.

She took his wrist in a firm grip and told him. "This might hurt a quite bit Mr. Potter, but I think you'll like the results." Placing the tip of her wand on the words carved in Harry's hand, she said, "Reverto ut tribuo si iniustus donatus."

Harry felt a painful burning sensation in the back of his hand and instinctively tried to pull away, but Madame Bones had an iron grip on his wrist and he couldn't get away.

"Just a few more moments, Mr. Potter," She whispered softly as a shriek came from Madame Umbridge.

Releasing Harry's hand, she said, "Have a look."

Harry looked at the back of his hand. The words that had been carved there for almost two years were now gone. "Thank you Madame Bones."

"You're quite welcome Mr. Potter." She assured him looking a little tired.

"Are you alright ma'am?" He asked concerned.

"Just a little tired." She assured him. "That spell takes a lot out of the caster because they become a channel for the pain."

“Can the counterspell remove the words from anyone?” Harry wanted to know.

“Only if the Blood Quill was used unjustly and the caster has to be strong enough to withstand the pain that went into putting the words there in the first place, before they are returned to the person who used the Blood Quill on its victim. It is part of the reason that Blood Quills were banned in the first place. They are so easy to abuse. Take your seat please, Mr. Potter.”

Taking a deep breath, Madame Bones said, “I think we have settled the question as to whether or not Miss Umbridge brought a Blood Quill into Hogwarts and used it on a student.” She pointed with a quill to where Umbridge was holding her left hand and rocking back and forth. “If she hadn’t, then the unjustly given punishment to write ‘I will not tell lies’ would not now be imbedded in her hand. Let that be a lesson to you Madame. Next charge Miss Glendowling.”

“The next charge is in three parts.” The court scribe recited from her list. “Madame Umbridge is charged with attempting to give veritaserum to an under-aged wizard. First without getting the Ministry’s approval to administer a truth drug she is not qualified to dispense. Secondly of attempted murder due to the fact that too much veritaserum was used in her first attempt and that might have killed Mr. Potter by overdose because she failed to follow the instructions of the school’s Potions Master in administering it. Thirdly she requested additional veritaserum to use on the same student at a later date, again without Ministry approval but due to the fact that the Potions Master of Hogwarts had none available she was unable to try again.”

“As a Ministry employee Umbridge, you know that veritaserum is only to be used with Ministry approval and to be given to any person to be questioned only by someone authorized to prepare and dispense it.” Madame Bones spoke up when the court scribe had finished. “I know from your records madam that you are neither of those. You failed to get an OWL in potions when you were going to school. Did you request Veritaserum from Professor Severus Snape?”

Knowing that if she denied requesting the veritaserum, they would just bring Professor Snape, who was a respected Potions Master in to confirm that he had indeed given her veritaserum to use on Mr. Potter and that she had requested a second vial from him, Umbridge decided to admit to this charge. She would however not accept the attempted murder charge. "I did request Veritaserum, but I did not intend to murder Mr. Potter with it."

"When I questioned Professor Snape about this matter, he advised me that he did instruct you as to its use and that you should place no more than three drops in any liquid. He will answer to charges for giving veritaserum to someone not licensed to use it." Madame Bones countered. "Given that fact that you knew how much the dosage was supposed to be, why did you feel compelled to use the whole vial he gave you? Did you think you knew more about how to use it than someone whose job it is to dispense veritaserum? Or did you just not care because this was Harry Potter a boy you were trying to silence and if he died while you were getting the truth from him, well it was no great loss?"

"That was not my intent, Madame Bones," Umbridge was sweating slightly. "The boy had information on two wanted criminals and it was desperately needed to try and stop the Death Eaters and to keep Dumbledore from destabilising the government. Sirius Black was a known Death Eater..."

"Who has since been cleared on all charges," Harry put in.

"Are you aware Miss Umbridge of the reason why we do not give Veritaserum to under-aged witches and wizards?" Madame Bones asked. "What made you think that you could get around Ministry rules? They are there for a reason."

"Yes ma'am I am, but I felt the knowledge that would be gained far outweighed the possible risks." Umbridge told her. "I felt that Mr. Potter's potential discomfort was far outweighed by the risk to the wizarding world if he were not interrogated under veritaserum."

"Discomfort!" Bones couldn't believe the woman could be that stupid. "You call the potential loss of Mr. Potter's magical gifts as strong as

they are and possible brain damage, discomfort! I would have used far different words, madam. Catastrophe or the complete and utter destruction of the wizarding world would have been my choice, given that a prophecy that has since been revealed showed that Mr. Potter was the only one who could defeat He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named."

Umbridge paled at the thought of if fate hadn't intervened, she might have taken out their only chance to defeat the Dark Lord once and for all.

"Read the last charge," Madame Bones instructed the scribe as she just glared at the idiotic woman.

Miss Glendowling read, "Headmistress Delores Umbridge did attempt to use of the Unforgivable Cruciatus curse on the person of Harry James Potter."

"I never cast any Unforgiveables." Umbridge told the tribunal.

"Only because you were stopped by Granger." Harry pointed out. "She had started to cast the curse before Hermione interrupted her with a shout."

"Is this true, Miss Granger?" Madame Hill asked.

"Yes ma'am it is." Granger told her.

"And why don't you tell them what you did to me leaving me at the mercy of those half-breeds in the Forbidden Forrest after you tricked me into going out there with you." Umbridge countered, wanting to take the two of them down with her. It was fairly easy by now to see that this tribunal was going to make sure she went down and went down hard.

Suggero Malium Radix - Provide injury source

Reverto ut tribuo si iniustus donatus - Return to the giver if unjustly given

..... But She Can't Be Fooled For Long

"To justice done." Mr Boet raised his glass of wine in a toast after the waiter had brought their orders.

"It's pity there are no more Dementors for Umbridge to spend time with at Azkaban. If anyone deserves them she does." Harry touched his glass to the solicitor's in acknowledgement, but to him justice wouldn't be done until all of those who had betrayed him had paid for their crimes. Then he observed, "Given that she was sentenced to over a thousand years in Azkaban, I wonder if they will wall up her cell when she dies, to make sure no one removes the body before her full sentence is served?"

Mr. Boet wisely made no comment to either statement by his client.

Before taking a bite of his meal Harry asked, "Alexander, what do think the chances are that Dumbledore will go down with Snape?"

After a moment's consideration, Boet replied. "Not very likely. He'll probably get probation. Also the Wizengamot may require some kind of monitor on his activities at the school for while. I spoke with Madame Bones the day I brought in your charges and your pensieve and she told me that the wards around Hogwarts should have alerted him to both Umbridge's activities and Snape's. That means he either ignored the warnings or has ignored so many previous warnings that Hogwarts is no longer alerting him to potential problems because he's given the castle the impression he doesn't want to know."

"Probably the latter." Harry commented, thinking back over his years at Hogwarts. "Any ideas about the possible punishments they could give Snape, if they decide to find him guilty?"

"Not many," Boet told him. "He is very skilled Potions Master and there are very few of those around, so if they do find him guilty, the punishment they give will not deprive them of those services for very long. One thing I will push for is that the man be banned from ever teaching again, unless it is to an apprentice and then that the master apprentice relationship be very carefully supervised."

Boet pulled a folder out of his carrying case and handed it to Harry. "These papers you need to sign as soon as you can so that the foundation can get started."

"What about the shelter for them especially during the full moon?" Harry took the folder and gave the contents a cursory look.

"I had one of my people and one of Gringotts best wizards check out the Black properties as you requested." Boet told him. "The best choice for a place for them to stay especially during the full moon would be Blackmoor Isle. The castle there, while it needs some work, is easily the size of Hogwarts. Given that it is on an island, it will be easiest to ward so that they can only leave it when they are human. That way they are safe and they don't have to be confined. They can run free on the nights of the full moon and I have been told that wards to insure they can't leave the island while in wolf form will be easy to put in place."

"Good," Harry was pleased with the arrangements. "Once the foundation is up and running, let the werewolves know there is shelter and employment there. I will pay them for repairing the castle."

"Did you want an article in the Daily Prophet to let them know about the foundation and the offer of work and shelter?" Boet wanted to know.

"Have the head of the Foundation hold a press conference and invite every paper, since werewolves are everywhere." Harry decided. "Remind the Daily Prophet that it is best not to bite the hand that feeds them, given that between all those families inherited from I now own about an eighty percent controlling interest in their paper. Make sure the Prophet understands that if they slant this story the wrong way, they will be shut down the minute it hits the street. Also make sure they understand I will no longer tolerate them being an extension of the Ministry. If they have no proof about what they print, it will not be printed. No longer will they be allowed to print innuendo and half truths."

"They are not going to like that." Boet observed.

"I don't give a damn." Harry countered. "I'm sick of them getting away with destroying people's lives. Oh and on that topic, make sure you put anti-animagi wards around the interview area. We don't want Skeeter to get any information on this and put her own special slant on it."

"That woman is a bit slimy snake, isn't she?" Boet commented and then caught on to what Harry had implied. "Are you saying that Rita Skeeter is an animagus?"

"Yep. An unregistered beetle animagus to be precise." Harry told him "Whatever wards are put up at the press conference, make sure they are set to trap any animagi who may try and sneak in. Rita won't be able pass up a story like this one. I have no doubt she will feel compelled to give it her own special touch. And if she does show up I want her exposed."

Boet made some notes to be passed on to those who would be doing the press conference to let the wizarding world and werewolves know about the Foundation. The two of them continued to discuss the Foundation through lunch.

"You said had some information on that family I asked you about?" Harry changed the subject as they started on dessert.

"Yes, I have what little information there is, right here." Boet pulled another folder out of his carrying case. "I had one of my people get the name from Ollivander and check out the records in the Ministry. There isn't much on the Weyland family."

"Isn't that one of the names on my inheritance list?" Harry inquired.

"Yes it is." Boet confirmed. "Gareth Weyland was condemned to the Kiss as Mr. Ollivander told you and it wasn't until after the Kiss had been performed that they found out he hadn't been working for Grindelwald, that it was another wizard who was almost his twin. Weyland's wife was killed during an air raid in Muggle London. That left a boy of nine Kerr and his two sisters Gwyneth who was three at the time and their baby sister Mari who was only about a year old. No wizarding family would take them in. The taint of the original

accusation was too strong, even after their father was proven innocent. None of them wanted to take another potential Dark Lord into their homes and families.”

“Why doesn’t that surprise me?” Harry wanted to know. “The wizarding world creates its own problems with those attitudes of theirs. I’m just glad I won’t have to deal with it after this year. What else do you have on the family?”

“Not much more,” Mr. Boet told him. “The Ministry confiscated all their property, but couldn’t touch the vaults at Gringotts since the Weylands were the main heirs of Ravenclaw line and her vaults were protected by magic far older than the Ministry, so they couldn’t get near them and the goblins weren’t going to hand them to the Ministry. The confiscated property was given to the families of those Gareth Weyland had supposedly wronged and even after it was proven that he wasn’t guilty, the Ministry made no attempts to get that property back and give it to the children. Nor did those who received the property offer to give it back.”

“That was probably part of what drove Kerr into Voldemort’s camp.” Harry commented.

“More than likely, given that he had no one to stand up for him and his sisters and insure they were treated fairly.” Mr. Boet agreed.

Harry was silent for several minutes. “I have a good idea what happened to Kerr given that according to Mr. Ollivander, he joined Voldemort, but do we have any idea what happened to his sisters?”

“Unfortunately not,” Mr. Boet told him. “Those times were very unsettled in both the Muggle and Wizarding worlds and it was far too easy for people to disappear for good. Tracking what happened to two little girls is going to be impossible. However given that you are the heir to the Weyland’s vault and it is a documented fact that Kerr had no children, it is reasonable to assume that he took his sisters out into the muggle world after a bombing and left them where they could be found and those who found them would assume that their parents were dead killed in the bombing. Kerr may have wanted to protect them from the prejudice he had already experienced in the

wizarding world, even if it meant he never saw them again. I do know they never attended any magical schools. At least they didn't under their real names, and if they did go, they were probably thought to be muggle-born."

Harry looked thoughtful. "I wish we had more than that, but you're right it would probably be impossible to track what happened to them, given that it happened nearly sixty years ago. Is there any way to find out what properties were confiscated? I want them back. They should have been given back, once my great-grandfather was proven innocent. Since those who received the properties weren't honourable enough to return them to the children they rightly belonged to, they will be forced to return them to their heir."

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When they returned to Courtroom One after lunch, Harry saw the room had undergone significant changes.

The raised dais where the tribunal had been seated earlier was no much larger than before and there was a heavy chair halfway between it and the tables he and Umbridge had sat at. In the room, there appeared to be about twenty witches or wizards, besides Madame Bones and Miss Glendowling the court scribe.

Once Madame Bones saw them, she called the hearing to order and nine of the older witches and wizards joined her on the dais.

"Given that a member of the Wizengamot is on trial here today along with Professor Snape, there will be more members to the tribunal." Mr Boet told Harry as they took their seats at the table on the right. "It is supposed to give the appearance of impartiality."

Harry snorted in disbelief at that statement. "And the chair?"

"You will sit in it when giving you testimony."

Madame Bones again went through the identification and confirmation of the participants for the record, and then instructed the court scribe to read the charges.

“Professor Severus Augustus Snape is charged with repeated assault and mind rape upon the person of Mr. Harry James Potter during his fifth year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. These assaults occurred from January to May in 1996 and were done under the guise of teaching Mr. Potter Occlumency.”

The court scribe paused briefly as she saw the name on the next charge. “Headmaster Albus Percival Brian Wulfric Dumbledore is charged as an accessory to the crimes of Professor Severus Augustus Snape for failing to properly supervise the Occlumency lesson that he forced Mr. Potter to have with Professor Snape, even though he was well aware of Professor’s Snape’s dislike for Mr. Potter.”

Harry looked down at the table in front of him until he could get his face schooled back into an expressionless mask. He felt like laughing at their choice of words. ‘Dislike’ was not quite the word he would have chosen. It sounded too polite. ‘Loathed’ or ‘despised’ were closer to the mark in Harry’s opinion, but then again the loathing was mutual.

“Mr. Boet, since your client is the one bringing the charges, you may begin.” Madame Bones told him.

“Thank you, Madame Bones.” Mr. Boet stood and called, “Mr. Talisin Nighbert, would you please take the witness seat?”

An ancient balding wizard who looked even older than Dumbledore came up and sat in the heavy wooden chair.

“Please tell us your occupation and current place of employment, Mr. Nighbert?” Mr. Boet requested.

“I am a Master Occlumens.” Mr. Nighbert told them. “For the past twenty years, I have been training Unspeakables in the arts of Occlumency and Legilimency.”

“Mr Nighbert, I would like to place a hypothetical student before you. This student must be trained quickly so that he/she can protect their

thoughts from a dark wizard, but has had no training in the mind arts. How would you begin to teach this student?" Mr. Boet wanted to know.

Nighbert was silent for several minutes before he answered. "Even though there seems to be some urgency in teaching this student, they would need a solid grounding before they can begin to master Occlumency. I would give him or her basic books on meditation and Occlumency so that he/she is able to understand the goals of the lessons. At the same time I would start teaching this student how to meditate and calm their thoughts. If a student can't learn to calm their minds then they will fail at Occlumency. It is not something everyone is capable of learning because it requires a great deal of focus, at least at first. Once a student is able to keep their minds calm, I would start teaching them how to protect their thoughts."

"And how do you teach them to do this?" Boet inquired.

"The techniques I use will vary from student to student." Nighbert told the assembled group. "Those with poor visualizations skills, I would teach how to build layered mental shields similar to domes. For those who are very good at visualization, I teach them how to hide what they don't want found, how to set traps or deflect Legilimens probes away from those thoughts. Once they have mastered that aspect of Occlumency, then I teach them to drive the invading mind out."

"Would there ever be a time when you would, oh say," Mr Boet paused as if looking for the right words, "stand a student of yours in the middle of the room on their first lesson and just say 'clear your mind' before repeatedly firing the Legilimens curse at them?"

"Of course not!" Nighbert seemed shocked at the very idea. "That wouldn't teach anyone how to protect their minds. In fact that would have the opposite effect on the student. Repeated exposure to the Legilimens Curse, without knowing how to rebuild the barriers in your mind could easily erode what natural barriers the mind does have, making it easier for someone to get in. It would also prove very painful for the person on the receiving end of the curse."

“Could permanent damage be done?” Madame Bones wanted to know.

“I don’t know.” Nighbert told her honestly. “It’s not exactly something you would want to experiment with, just to find out. Knowing what I know about how the curse works, I know that the brain will react as if injured if repeatedly exposed to the Legilimens Curse. The person on the receiving end of the curse will at the very least experience very severe migraine headaches.”

“Mr. Nighbert,” Dumbledore spoke for the first time. “Is there any other way that you know of to quickly teach someone Occlumency, if there is not enough time to go through the method you proposed?”

“There are no shortcuts to teaching someone Occlumency unless you don’t care about the person your teaching being sane at the end of the lessons. And if that is the case, then it would be far kinder not to teach them at all and just kill them with poison or a knife.” Nighbert asserted. “You should know that, Headmaster. I understand you are a Master Occlumens yourself.”

“One last question, Mr. Nighbert.” Boet told him. “Would you ever teach someone you disliked?”

Nighbert gave the matter a lot of thought before answering. “Only if I couldn’t avoid it, and then it would depend on how much I disliked the person. If it was someone I hated, then I would asked that they be given another teacher, because I know that I might not be able to put my feelings aside and do a good job teaching them what they needed to know.”

“I have no more questions for Mr. Nighbert, Madame Bones.” Mr. Boet concluded.

“Does anyone else have any questions for Mr. Nighbert?” Madame Bones directed the question to the Wizengamot members and then looked toward Dumbledore and Snape. When they all indicated they didn’t, Madame Bones told the elderly wizard. “Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Nighbert.”

“Madame Bones,” the ancient wizard bowed slightly toward her in respect and then turned and bowed toward Harry giving him a slightly deeper bow before he returned to his seat.

Harry just nodded.

“Next I would like Headmaster Albus Dumbledore to take the witness seat.” Mr. Boet requested. “Also Madame Bones, since Headmaster Dumbledore has been known for keeping secrets from my client as well as the rest of the wizarding world, I must ask that he be given Veritaserum as well as swear a magically binding oath, to insure that we get the truth and not just what he wants us to hear. Given that Headmaster Dumbledore is a very powerful wizard it is possible he may be able to overcome most if not all of the effects of veritaserum.”

“Are you implying that the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot would lie to us?” One of the wizards on the panel demanded.

“No, not lie, just not tell us the whole truth.” Boet countered smoothly. “For the past almost twenty years, Dumbledore has been keeping secrets from my client, deciding how much my client had the right to know, when he should have been told the whole truth the first time he asked about it. But Dumbledore didn’t want to risk destroying his Great Experiment. The Muggles call it the Nature vs. Nurture Theory.”

“The what vs. what theory?” Another member of the panel asked.

“Muggle Psychologists have been debating for years on which is stronger.” Mr. Boet explained. “Whether it is the inherent nature a person is born with that makes them what they are? You know whether a person is born good or evil. Or is it the way they are raised that makes them what they are? Ever since the death of Mr. Potter’s parents, it is my belief that Headmaster Dumbledore has been conducting this experiment, using Mr. Potter as the lab rat, to try to prove to himself that nothing he could have done would have stopped the person who eventually became Voldemort from going Dark. His actions insured that Mr Potter was raised in a similar environment to the one Voldemort was raised in.”

After the expected flinches at Voldemort's name, Mr. Boet continued, "This may explain why it was so easy for him to believe that Mr. Potter had indeed killed Neville Longbottom. He thought his experiment had failed, and so he wanted to get Mr. Potter to somewhere he could be contained, so he couldn't cause any more damage. But this has little to do with the matter before this court. I have requested that Headmaster Dumbledore be given Veritaserum, so we can get the whole truth of the matter before us and I don't believe he will give it all freely. I also give my Wizard's Oath I will ask no questions except those which I believe pertain to the matter before us."

There was a brief conference between the Wizengamot members on the panel, before Madame Bones announced, "Your request for Headmaster Dumbledore to be given Veritaserum is granted as well as swearing him in under a magically binding oath."

Dumbledore looked very reluctant to take the witness seat, once he heard that Boet was going to be allowed to question him under Veritaserum and that he was going to be bound with a magically binding oath, but from the look on Amelia's face he knew he wasn't going to be able to talk his way out of it. He also had no choice about refusing to take the witness seat, since he had been called.

Once the oath and Veritaserum had been administered, Boet asked a few innocent questions until he heard the flat tone that indicated the veritaserum had finally taken hold. Dumbledore had fought the good fight against the potion though but Boet could tell that by the sweat on his forehead and the slightly glazed look in his eyes that the potion had finally won the battle.

Boet chose his first question with care. "Headmaster Dumbledore according to Mr. Nighbert you are a Master of the art of Occlumency, is this correct?"

"Yes," Dumbledore said nothing more.

"Why then did you send Professor Severus Snape to Grimmauld Place shortly after Christmas in 1995 to tell Mr Potter that he would be teaching him Occlumency?" Boet asked.

"I could not take the risk of seeing Mr. Potter face to face." Dumbledore replied in a monotone. "I knew the anger he was feeling wasn't all his, though some of it was because I had kept him in the dark and prevented his friends from writing to him or telling him what was going on. Voldemort was using the link between them to try and take control of Harry or at the very least to gain information from him without his knowledge"

"And you chose not to tell Mr. Potter that you thought that Voldemort was trying to use him to gain information, is this correct?"

"Yes."

"Why not? Surely if Mr. Potter had known the reason behind the need for the lessons, he might have been more willing to learn what Professor Snape was going to teach him." Boet pointed out.

"I couldn't take the chance of Voldemort finding out, that I knew about his attempts to influence young Harry or use the link between them to gain information." Dumbledore told them.

"Given that you are a Master Occlumens yourself, why did you not teach the boy yourself? Surely knowing how Snape felt about Potter you should have known that you would be a better choice to teach him than Snape," Was Boet's next question.

"I couldn't take the risk that Harry might master Occlumency as quickly as he had the Patronus Charm, because then he might learn things I wasn't ready for him to know," was Dumbledore's answer. "I was the only one who knew the whole of the prophecy and I wasn't ready to tell it to Mr. Potter yet. If he stumbled upon it accidentally, I might lose what control I did have over him, especially if he told his godfather to contents of the Prophecy. I also couldn't take the chance of Voldemort using him as a conduit into my mind, if he learned from Harry's thoughts that I was teaching the boy how to protect his mind."

"Why did you assign Severus Snape the task of teaching Mr. Potter Occlumency?" Boet moved onto the next topic, even though there were a number of questions he would like to ask about why

Dumbledore wanted to maintain his control over Potter, but his Wizard's oath wouldn't allow it since it had nothing to do with the matter of Snape's abusive actions toward his client.

"Professor Snape was the only other master of Occlumency available to me." Dumbledore reported. "All the others were at the Ministry and given the fact that the Minister was trying to destroy me, Mr. Potter, and Hogwarts, I didn't feel it was a good idea to ask the Minister to let me use one of their Master Occlumens to teach Harry."

"What made you think he would be able to put aside his anger long enough to teach Mr. Potter how to block his mind from Voldemort? Surely you knew he hated the very fact that Harry Potter existed." Boet knew the one problem with Veritaserum was that you had to know the right questions to ask, because if you didn't you might not get all the information you needed.

"I was certain that Severus would be able to put aside his anger toward James Potter for the greater good." Dumbledore countered. "After all he wanted Voldemort gone just as much as the rest of the wizarding world."

"Are you certain of that?" Boet couldn't help asking.

"Of course I am."

"Did you ever attend any of the Occlumency lessons that Professor Snape gave to Mr. Potter?" Boet already knew the answer to this, but it was leading up to his next question.

"No, I did not." Dumbledore admitted.

"Why didn't you monitor their sessions, Albus?" Madame Bones asked the next question. "Even I knew that Professor Snape hated Harry Potter. Why would you allow him free access to Mr. Potter's mind, unsupervised?"

"I had to keep the Ministry from finding out that I was having Mr. Potter taught Occlumency." Dumbledore told them. "If I had gone down to the Potions lab where Harry was supposed to be having

Remedial Potions, and the High Inquisitor found out that the sessions weren't remedial potions lessons, then the Minister would have known something was going on. As for Severus violating Harry's mind, I knew he wouldn't because he knew that Harry was just as important to the side of Light as he was."

"So basically it would be safe to say that you the Headmaster, who was responsible for the physical safety and well-being of all the students in your charge, decided to leave a young man's mental health and safety in the hands of man who hatred of the young man's father was damn near as legendary as the hatred between Gryffindor and Slytherin. Is that correct?" A witch on the panel asked.

"Yes," Dumbledore agreed.

"I have no further questions." Mr Boet told the panel.

The panel apparently had no further questions for the Headmaster either, because the antidote was quickly administered and he returned to his seat looking thoughtful.

"The next witness called will be Harry James Potter." Boet spoke up. "Since he is now old enough for there to be no harm to his mind or his magic, I also ask that he be given Veritaserum and I had already had from Mr. Potter his permission to administer a magically binding oath, so that Professor Snape can not claim later on that he was lying in his testimony."

Harry took the seat without a moment's hesitation then after swearing the oath and answering a few questions from the Potions Master, who was going to be dosing him with the truth drug, swallowed the three drops that were placed in his mouth.

After the first few questions Harry could feel the potion take hold and it gave him a kind of floaty feeling like he was there and yet really wasn't.

"Mr. Potter, when were you first told about the Occlumency lessons you were to attend?" The question seemed to come from a great distance.

“It was a couple of days after Christmas.” Harry responded. “Snape had stopped by Grimmauld Place and after insulting Padfoot for a few minutes, he told me I would be learning Occlumency in the upcoming term.”

“Did he tell you why you were to receive these lessons or what they were to do?”

“He said it was a magical defence of the mind against external penetration. I assumed he meant possession, but then I thought he had to be wrong, because we had all agreed I wasn’t possessed when I saw Nagini attack Mr. Weasley.” Harry told them. “The only reason he gave me for my being taught Occlumency was that Dumbledore had ordered it. He also said no one was to know about the lessons.”

“How did you feel when you were told that you would be learning Occlumency from Professor Snape?” Boet wanted to know.

“I felt like the Headmaster had just punched me in the gut with a bludger.” Harry admitted. “I also couldn’t help wondering what I had done to be condemned to spending more time with Snape. I couldn’t understand why Dumbledore would leave me in the hands of someone who hated the very ground I stood on, for something that wasn’t even my fault.”

“What happened during your first lesson with Professor Snape?” Boet inquired.

“I had no sooner come in the door and Snape started insulting me.” Harry reported matter-of-factly. “After explaining some of the reasons why I needed to learn Occlumency, he told me to stand and take out my wand. I was instructed to try and disarm him or at least to defend myself while he tried to break into my mind. He wanted to see how well I could resist.”

“And was he successful at breaking into your mind?” A woman’s voice that Harry identified as Madame Bones inquired.

“Yes ma’am,” Harry told her. “I finally managed to drive him out when he started getting very close to a personal memory.”

“Then what happened?” An unfamiliar voice asked.

“He insulted me some more by telling me I had wasted time shouting and that I needed to remain focused, so that I could drive him out with my mind and not my wand. I pointed out to him that I was trying, but that he had never told me how to do it. He then told me to close my eyes and clear my mind and let go of my emotions, but he still never told me how I was supposed to accomplish that. He attacked me several more times with the Legilimens curse.” Harry recounted the rest of the first lesson.

“Was each lesson like this?” Harry recognized the voice asking the question as Dumbledore’s.

“Pretty much.” Harry admitted. “After the first lesson, every time I came into the Potions Lab he would tell me to take my wand out and clear my mind and then fire the Legilimens curse at me over and over, insulting me and my parents in-between rounds of the curse. Every night I would leave there feeling as if my head had been a target for the bludgers.”

“You were never given any books to study so that you could learn how to clear your mind and calm your thoughts?” Another unfamiliar voice asked.

“No,” Harry told them simply. “Why would Snape bother telling me if there were any books on the subject, when it was clear from the first lesson that he considered the whole thing a waste of his valuable time?”

“What finally brought the lessons to an end?” Madame Bones asked.

“I had a look at Snape’s memories in the Pensieve Dumbledore had given him and he got mad at me for looking at my father’s humiliating him in front of the whole school.” Harry told them. “At the time I thought it was only fair. He’d been poking around in my memories for months, so why shouldn’t I be allowed a look at his. Personally I think

he was looking for an excuse and since Dumbledore wasn't there to force him to continue the lessons, he just stopped them, using my looking into the pensieve that he left out as an excuse. I was kind of glad even though I had seen how much of a bully my father was to him. It reminded me a lot of Dudley's 'Harry Hunting'. I was just glad I never had to go back."

"What is Harry Hunting?" It was Dumbledore's voice again.

"That has nothing to..." Mr Boet spoke up, but it was too late.

Harry had started answering the question. "It was a game my cousin invented. He and his gang would hunt me and if they found me they would beat the crap out of me. Once I was going to Hogwarts and wasn't around quite so much they started hunting the other smaller kids in the neighbourhood and beating up on them."

There was silence in the courtroom for several minutes, before Madame Bones said, "I think we've heard enough from this witness."

Harry returned silently to his seat. He wasn't pleased that he had mentioned the 'Harry Hunting' but it was a little late to worry about it now. It wasn't like those in the wizarding world would do anything about it. On the whole they were highly ineffectual at anything even remotely resembling true justice. He wasn't too worried about that. He would see justice done to Dudley. Even now he had a private detective following Dudley around and taking pictures of his activities. Dudley wasn't back at Smeltings this year. He had been expelled at the end of the previous year for assaults on the younger boys. It had taken a sizable chunk of Vernon's money to cover it up, but he had managed to avoid his son going to jail. Vernon and Petunia were still very blind to all of Dudley's faults and misdeeds. If the detectives he hired were efficient enough then he might have himself a wonderful Christmas present from the Dursleys for the first time in his life, when nothing Vernon could do would prevent his son from going to jail.

Harry had been so involved in his daydream of seeing Dudley get what was finally coming to him, that he missed seeing Snape take the witness seat and taking the oath and Veritaserum.

Boet was asking his first question. "Professor Snape, we have heard from Mr. Nighbert how he would teach a student who had no experience in the mind arts how to master Occlumency. And we have heard from Mr. Potter how his first lesson with you went. What I want to know is why you didn't use the method recommended by Mr. Nighbert on with Mr. Potter?"

"Because Mr. Potter should have already known how to clear his mind." Snape answered, managing to sound snide even under truth serum. "He is a wizard after all. He should know the proper meditation techniques to clear his mind. I shouldn't have to start him off at the beginning."

"Would you have taught say Miss Hermione Granger the same way?" Boet inquired.

"I wouldn't voluntarily teach that arrogant little know-it-all Occlumency, but if I was forced to by the Headmaster of course I wouldn't use the same method, I did with Potter. She's muggle-born, she wouldn't know the first thing about the proper meditation techniques." Snape responded.

"And Mr. Potter was raised in the Muggle world so how does that make him any different from her?" Boet sounded as if he were confused by the logic.

"Because he's a Potter of course." Snape answered as though that should have been obvious. "They are always different."

"That still doesn't explain why you expected him to know the proper meditation techniques to calm and clear his mind. Things that he would have learned only if he had grown up in the wizarding world and not the muggle one." Boet continued to sound puzzled. "You do remember that Mr. Harry Potter had no contact with the wizarding world, until he attended Hogwarts don't you?"

"Yes I of course I know that." Snape growled.

"I put it to you, Professor Snape that you really didn't want to teach Mr. Potter how to block Voldemort from his mind." Boet suggested.

“That you took the chance of having unrestricted access to Mr. Harry Potter to pay his father back for what he did to you while you went to school. What I want to know is why you would attack a student who has never done you any harm?”

“So what if I did?” Snape countered. “The arrogant little brat deserved to be taken down a peg. Waited on hand and foot in the muggle world and then lording it around Hogwarts just like his father did when he was in the wizarding world. Acting so smug and superior, even when he was clearly in the wrong.”

“So you admit to using the Occlumency sessions to deliberately attack Mr. Potter?” Madame Bones wanted clarification.

“No, I did not attack Mr. Potter.” Snape told her. “I wanted to show him he wasn’t special. It was up to him to find the information he needed to succeed in learning Occlumency on his own. If he couldn’t, then it was his own fault if he suffered for it.”

“Did you even tell him there were books or other things that needed to be done to succeed at Occlumency?” Madame Bones asked.

“I told him to clear his mind.” Snape told her. “He should have been able to figure it out from there, after all he’s a Potter.”

“And what teaching method would you have used if I had been there, Severus?” Dumbledore sounded disappointed. “Would you have used the same method or would you have changed it because there was a witness?”

“Of course I wouldn’t have used the same method.” Snape admitted. “You didn’t want your precious golden boy hurt and that would have taken three times as long to teach.”

“You’ve heard him, Madame Bones,” Mr. Boet pointed out as Snape was given the antidote. “He doesn’t even feel that he has done anything wrong. Professor Snape feels that he was perfectly justified in attacking Mr. Potter and why, because he is a Potter. Instead of burying the grudge he still feels for Mr. Potter’s father, and doing what

was necessary to help Mr. Potter protect his mind, Professor Snape admits to repeatedly attacking him.”

As Snape returned to his seat at the table, the Wizengamot members conferred. Nothing was heard because of the silencing charms that had been put up by Madame Bones. They even spent some time reviewing evidence from a pensieve

It was nearly fifteen minutes before the silencing charms came down and the oldest wizard present on the panel, Martin Bellacote stood to give their judgement. “Professor Severus Snape has been found guilty of deliberately and repeatedly attacking Mr. Harry Potter. It is this panel’s belief, that Professor Snape should have been able to put aside his grudge against James Potter long enough to teach his son what he needed to keep He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named out of his mind. Professor Severus Augustus Snape, you are hereby sentenced to serve five years in Azkaban for the assault and mind rape of Mr. Harry James Potter. You will also serve one additional year for being willing to provide Veritaserum to Delores Umbridge who was neither licensed to have or dispense this potion, so that it could be used on the person of Harry Potter.”

“I did not provide veritaserum to Umbridge.” Snape countered. “It was distilled water.”

“Was it indeed?” Bellacote looked at him in disbelief. “Madame Umbridge was not aware of that fact. She acknowledged that you provided her with veritaserum upon her request for it.”

“I told the Headmaster upon his return to the school what I had done.” Snape told the panel.

“Be that as it may,” Bellacote countered, “given your rather well displayed hatred of Mr. Potter, I think that the only reason you probably provided her with fake serum was to avoid the possibility she might dose you with it, or learn some things you didn’t want her to know, not because you were trying to protect Mr. Potter. The sentence stands.”

Bellacote turned his attention to Dumbledore. "Albus, it is you I am most disappointed in. I realise that you tend to expect the good out of everyone around you, but Professor Snape's hatred of Mr. Potter is very well known. How could you allow him to have unrestricted and unsupervised access to a student he has shown nothing but hatred for since before he even started school? It is believed that you have too many things to oversee, Albus as evidenced by your neglect of your duties to Hogwarts and the students there who should be your primary responsibility. Given past issues, such as the Dark Lord and his minions gaining access to your school not once but several times, it has been decided that for the next five years Hogwarts shall be monitored by the Wizengamot. There will be unannounced inspectors and inspections of all teachers and their teaching credentials. Don't worry this won't be like when Fudge tried to take over your school. Also for the same five year period, your duties as Head of the Wizengamot shall be delegated to others so that you can focus on your primary responsibility the students at Hogwarts."

Mr Boet stood up at this point. "Esteemed members of the panel I would like to request two further additions to Professor Snape's sentence."

"And those are?" Madame Gwendolyn Hill inquired.

"First that Professor Snape's teaching credentials be removed." Mr Boet told them. "If you check with the Board of Governors of Hogwarts you will find there have been a number of complaints about the man's teaching methods over the years. He has terrorised any number of students to the point where those who might have considered a career in Potions decided otherwise out of fear. I am not saying that Professor Snape should not pass on his skills, but it is just quite clear the man should not be teaching in a classroom environment. He may have better luck one on one, but if he does take on an apprentice, then I strongly recommend that the Master/Apprentice relationship be carefully monitored."

"And your second request?" Madame Bones spoke up.

"It involves the delicate matter of an unpaid life debt." Mr Boet told them. "Professor Snape incurred this life debt when Mr. Potter's

father saved his life in their fifth year. Whether it was because he was saving his own neck or not, James Potter did put his own life at risk when he saved then fellow fifth year student Severus Snape. That life debt was transferred to Mr. Harry Potter when it remained unpaid at the time of James Potter's death. Technically, Professor Snape's unjustified attacks on Mr. Potter could be considered a violation of that debt if Mr Potter wanted them to be and he could suffer the loss of his magic. However Mr. Potter has told me what he would consider fair restitution for the life debt and the violation of that debt. Once he is free and for the remainder of Mr. Snape's life, every month near the time of the full moon, he must make all the wolfsbane potion necessary for the Remus Lupin Foundation."

"That's preposterous!" Snape declared loudly. "That life debt was paid during Mr. Potter's first year. I saved him from falling to his death when Professor Quirrell who was possessed by the Dark Lord jinxed his broom."

Harry coughed before saying, "Actually that was Granger. She knocked Quirrell into the seats in front of him, in her hurry to reach you to set fire to your robes. That's what saved me. She broke his eye contact with my broom."

"There is an easy way to settle the matter." Bellacote told them, taking out his wand. "Geall eadaraibh Snape anoar Potter. If there is no debt owed, then there will be no bond of light between you. Also the one owed will have a glow around them."

A few moments later a thread of yellow light appeared, joining Snape to Potter and Potter was the one surrounded by a glow.

"Yes, you have attempted to repay the life debt Professor Snape, but since you are still bound by a thread of it to Mr Potter, those attempts have not been completely successful in releasing the debt."

The members of the panel conferred for several more minutes, before Martin Bellacote announced, "Both requests are valid. From this day forth, Professor Severus Snape's teaching credentials are suspended. The only kind of teaching relationship that the Ministry or the Wizengamot will sanction for Potions Master Severus Augustus

Snape is that of master to apprentice and that teaching relationship will be carefully monitored. Also it is laudable that Mr. Potter doesn't wish the world to suffer the loss of a great Potions Master, so the terms of Mr. Snape's repayment for the remainder of the life debt will be as requested by Mr Harry Potter. Every month once he has served his sentence and for the remainder of his life, he will make all the wolfsbane potion necessary for the Remus Lupin Foundation."

"This hearing is adjourned." Madame Bones pounded the gavel on the bench before her.

Geall -debt

Eadaraibh - between

Anoar – and

Medals! I don't need no stinkin' medals!

When Dumbledore returned to Hogwarts around dinnertime, he was greeted by a standing ovation from everyone in the Great Hall except the Slytherins and Harry.

The Slytherins were looking toward the Great Hall doors, waiting for their Head of House to appear.

When Snape still hadn't appeared by the time Dumbledore had taken his place at the Head table, the Slytherins began talking amongst themselves in low voices trying to figure out where he might be.

Dumbledore gestured for the cheering students to resume their seats. When the Great Hall was silent once more, he spoke. "You have no idea how pleased I am to be back among you all. After dinner I would like the Staff, Head Boy and Girl, as well as all Prefects to meet me in the Staff Room."

Silence greeted Dumbledore's announcement and he started to sit down.

Malfoy got to his feet before Dumbledore was completely seated and asked. "Headmaster, where is Professor Snape?"

Dumbledore got back to his feet and told him. "I would prefer to discuss that at the meeting after dinner, Mr. Malfoy."

"We have the right to know where our Head of House is, sir." Malfoy disagreed, gesturing to the Slytherins around him who nodded their heads in agreement.

Seeing that Malfoy and the other Slytherins were not going to yield on this matter, Dumbledore sighed, "very well Mr. Malfoy. Professor Snape is unfortunately on his way to Azkaban. The tribunal found him guilty on all charges."

"On what charges?" Malfoy wanted to know.

"That is none of your concern, Mr. Malfoy." Dumbledore told him.

“Can you tell us how long he will be in Azkaban and when he will be coming back here to teach?” A third year Slytherin girl asked.

“Once Professor Snape has been released from Azkaban, I am afraid he will not be returning to Hogwarts.” Dumbledore told the silently waiting students.

There were loud cheers from the Hufflepuff and Gryffindor tables at this news.

The Ravenclaws didn't look all that surprised by the news, given his teaching methods, but they were largely silent.

The Slytherins on the other hand looked positively murderous. They knew who was responsible for Snape's incarceration and some of them started planning what they were going to make Potter pay.

Draco Malfoy, however, was not going to wait to make Potter pay for his actions. If nothing was done to stop the arrogant Gryffindor, Draco was willing to bet he would continue to decimate Slytherin House of its best, like his father and godfather.

The Great Hall was still in an uproar as Draco moved cautiously down the far side of the Slytherin table, trying to avoid detection. Not that anyone would have noticed him, given the chaos and crowd of people trying to get to the end of the Gryffindor table, where Harry Potter was currently seated. It looked like quite a few of the Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs were trying to congratulate the arrogant git, but from what he could see of the expression on Potter's face, he wanted nothing to do with any of them.

Draco reached the best vantage point just as Potter apparently decided he'd had enough because he got up and started pushing his way through the milling crowd of students.

Draco waited until he had a clear shot before raising his wand and firing off the curse.

A moment later there screams as students scattered out of the way of the curse that was heading toward Potter. Those who were closest to him noticed that Harry made no attempt to dodge the curse as they had done. Instead he raised his hand in a halting motion and the curse stopped just before it would have hit him. However instead of dispelling the curse with a finite as they expected, Potter seemed to be studying it, then he made a shooping gesture with his hand and the curse sped off back the way it came.

As it reached the far side of the room, near the Slytherin table, the watching students saw it swerve as if it were looking for someone or something. The Slytherins were scattering out of its way like the Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs had a few moments before as the spell sped down their table, so all anyone saw was a burst of yellow light as the curse found what it was looking for.

In the almost deafening silence that filled the Great Hall they heard a squeak and several students caught sight of a streak of white on the stone flagged floor that was headed toward the Great Hall doors.

“Not this time.” Harry commented making a gesture with his hand.

The white ferret flew backwards and came to a halt in mid-air in front of Harry. It was trying to curl up into a ball as Harry studied it.

“I wonder which Slytherin you are.” Harry murmured. “I also wonder if you were stupid enough to try and make the transfiguration permanent.”

“It’s Draco Malfoy the Amazing Bouncing Ferret!” Ron shouted. “Remember fourth year, Harry.”

This announcement earned Ron laughter from his fellow Gryffindors who remembered the incident where Moody or at least someone pretending to be Moody had turned Draco in to a white ferret. The laughter quickly stopped however when Harry gave Ron a death glare, that would have rivalled one of Snape’s. Ron quickly vanished into the crowd of students as Professor McGonagall strode up to Harry, looking furious.

“Mr Potter!”

Harry spoke up before McGonagall could get started. “I believe you may want to take care of Mr. Malfoy, Professor. He seems to have had an accident with a spell he cast.”

“Mr Potter, how could you be so foolish?” McGonagall glared at the young man. “Fifty points from Gryffindor. That curse could have hit anybody when you sent it back. Why didn’t you simply dispel the curse once you stopped it from striking you? ”

“It wouldn’t have hit anybody.” Harry countered. “I put a return to sender charm on it, so the only one who was going to hit with it would be the one who sent it in the first place.”

“Nevertheless you endangered your fellow students.” Professor McGonagall went on. “You should have just dispelled the curse, so no one was hurt.”

Harry just stared at her his face an expressionless mask. “I’m a big believer in reaping what you sow, Professor. Malfoy sowed this, so he should reap it. I do hope you are able to reverse the transfiguration, otherwise the Malfoy line will end right here.”

He turned on his heel to leave and then turned back for a moment and glared at the ferret. The silence in the Great Hall was again almost deafening, so everyone heard his final words. “Malfoy, consider this your last warning. I have had enough of you and the rest of the Slytherins. However if you or any of the other Slytherins are stupid enough to try and harm me, let me warn you here and now, you will not like the results and your children’s children will be feeling them, that is a promise from me to you. We just have to get through this last year together and then we can go our separate ways and never see each other again.”

Turning on his heel, Potter left. Those nearest the Great Hall doors saw him walk out the main doors of the castle and on to the grounds.

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Hagrid found him sitting on a large boulder near the lake, watching the glittering surface change colours as the sun began to set.

“ello ‘arry,” Hagrid greeted the younger wizard cautiously.

“Hagrid,” Harry didn’t take his gaze off the surface of the lake. “Did they send you out here after me?”

Hagrid settled down on the ground beside the boulder, before he answered. “No, I came on me own. Thought ye might want someone ta talk to.”

“Well you were wrong.” Harry told him. “You and I have nothing to talk about. You chose your side last year and it wasn’t mine.”

“I don’t know what yer talkin’ about.” Hagrid sounded confused. “I never chose anyone’s side.”

“Oh, but you did, Hagrid.” Harry countered. “I know that you were the one who kept Remus from coming to that farce of a trial the Ministry gave me.”

“On Dumbledore’s orders,” Hagrid told him. “He didn’t want Lupin puttin’ ‘imself at risk. I was the only one strong enough ta keep him ‘ere at Hogwarts.”

“Exactly,” Harry nodded in confirmation. “You chose Dumbledore over me. During my time in Azkaban, it would have been nice to know that someone out here didn’t think I was capable of murdering Neville.”

Hagrid stared at him shocked. “I never thought you murdered Longbottom. An’ my bein’ there would’a done ye no good. I couldn’t a stood up fer ye, me bein’ a half-giant ‘n all. They never would’a listened ta me.”

“You wouldn’t have had to testify on my behalf. All you would have had to do was let me know you were there for me but you didn’t do that.” Harry told him. “If I had known you and Remus believed in me and that you weren’t there as a part of the group that was convinced I

was guilty, it would've been a great comfort to me, but in choosing to do what Dumbledore told you, you denied me that. You chose the easy way out by remaining silent, instead of standing up for what you believed. You wouldn't do for me what I had done for you more than once. I stood by you and helped you when you did stupid things, like trying to keep a dragon, when you knew it was illegal not to mention dangerous for you to do so. And I risked my life to help clear you of the charges that got you sent to Azkaban when the Chamber of Secrets was reopened. Not to mention got you cleared of the original charges that got you expelled from Hogwarts."

There was a pause as Harry got to his feet. "So you see we have nothing to talk about. You and I clearly have different ideas about loyalty and what being a friend is. You stay with the side you chose and leave me alone."

Hagrid watched as Harry walked back up to the castle, and tears filled his eyes at the realisation that he had lost a very precious gift... Harry's friendship and he didn't have any idea about how to get it back.

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Dumbledore entered the Staff room after dinner his face solemn. The only prefect missing was Draco Malfoy, but he knew from Professor McGonagall that it might take some time to figure out how to reverse the transfiguration spell.

"I will get to the most important matter first, so that the Prefects and the Head Boy and Girl can be about their duties." Dumbledore began. "With Professor Snape no longer here, you will need to keep a close watch on the students in your Houses. I am not blind nor have I ever been blind to how Professor Snape favoured his own House and allowed them to get away with things that he would punish the students of the other Houses for. Those students, who have been ill-treated by the Slytherins, may try and revenge themselves against the perpetrators, since they no longer have to worry about retribution from Professor Snape." He paused for a moment eyeing the Slytherin Prefects earnestly. "Slytherin Prefects, I must also ask you to keep a watchful eye on those in your House. They may also decide that the

absence of Professor Snape gives them license to get vengeance of their own for acts perpetrated on them, or their families.”

All the Prefects, Head Boy and Girl agreed to do their best to keep things from getting out of hand between the houses, given the absence of Snape, who they all agreed had been the only thing holding the other Houses in check from trying to get any kind of revenge on the Slytherins. They also acknowledged at least privately that Snape was the one who had kept the Slytherins marginally under control. The teachers also agreed to help, since the Prefects, Head Boy and Girl couldn't be everywhere.

Once the students were gone, Dumbledore turned his attention to the remaining matter. “Until we replace Severus, I will teach Potions. I would like all of you to give some thought over the next few days to who would be best to fill the post of Potions teacher. A Potions Master would be preferred, but they are few and far between, especially those of Professor Snape's calibre. I would like to try and replace him before the Christmas break if possible.”

The teachers nodded and then all but McGonagall filed out of the Staff Room.

“Albus, I need to speak with you about Mr. Potter.” McGonagall spoke up after closing the door and casting a silencing charm on the room.

“What about Mr. Potter?” Dumbledore looked old and tired.

“I am beginning to have my doubts about the wisdom of having him back at Hogwarts.” Minerva told him honestly. “I know you want to try and get him to forgive those who wronged him last year, but I don't think Mr. Potter has any intentions of going along with your plans. He made it quite clear the day you and Severus were arrested, that this wasn't the only thing he had in mind.”

Dumbledore nodded his head in acknowledgement of her concerns. “Yes, that young man has a lot more anger in him than I originally thought. Most of it unfortunately is justified, given our actions last year. All we can do Minerva is help him work through it.”

“Headmaster, that plan will only work if the boy is willing to be co-operative,” McGonagall pointed out. “And so far he has proven to be very rebellious. From what I and the other teachers have seen so far he has no intention of co-operating with us. He has racked up more detentions in the past couple of weeks than the Weasley twins did during any of the years they attended Hogwarts.”

“We must wait him out Minerva.” Dumbledore told her. “Maintaining that level of anger day in and day out will soon become very tiring for Mr. Potter and then we should be able to make headway in bringing him back to us.”

McGonagall sighed. “I hope you are right, Albus.”

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It was near the end of September that a note from Mr. Ollivander was delivered to Harry by a small barn owl, advising him that he would be there on Friday around noon with the completed staff. Harry had to admit to being slightly curious about what the staff would look like, even though the only use he would probably get out of it was as a walking stick, since there was no one at Hogwarts who would be able to teach him how to use it. He also had no doubt that as soon as the students and staff saw the staff in his possession the grapevine would be humming like a hive of bees since there hadn't been a wizard since Merlin who needed one.

Harry grimaced as he realised that his having a staff would undoubtedly make him even more desirable as a husband, given the fact that he had to be an extremely powerful wizard to use a staff instead of a wand to channel his magic. In fact he had already had a number of young witches from the other houses trying to get his attention over the past few weeks and this would probably make the foolish girls redouble their efforts in trying to snag Harry Potter: The-Boy-Who-Lived-And Destroyed-Voldemort as their husband.

Remembering the one and only time he had seen the Malfoys together Harry was willing to bet that in the old and influential wizarding families arranged marriages were usually the norm and that love was not a factor; power, wealth and influence were. However he

now knew that he was now the target of some of those families having accidentally overheard a conversation a few weeks ago between several girls that he knew came from those proud old wizarding families. The girls were doing their level best to try and snag him as a husband obviously on the orders of their parents. Apparently they were willing to overlook the fact that his mother was a muggle-born, in favour of getting their daughter married to someone as powerful as he was proving to be.

In fact, several of them who never would've even looked at him before, had tried to get him alone in the past few weeks. They were apparently counting the fact that he was largely ignorant of wizard courting customs, to try and trap him into a situation where he would be forced to marry them. Ginny Weasley had been the most persistent of those trying to snag him as a husband, refusing to believe that Harry didn't desire her, given that she desired him. He had been very careful not to eat or drink anything she might have had contact with, just in case she decided to escalate matters and try a love potion. He still remembered the giggly conversation she and Hermione had had with her mother about love potions that summer before his fourth year when they were staying at the Burrow for a month.

He wondered what their parents would say if they knew that his mother had been a direct descendant of Rowena Ravenclaw and not a muggle-born at all. He was half tempted to tell them the truth and watch them keel over in shock, but he was saving that until the end of the year along with his really big surprise.

Harry couldn't help wondering just how gullible they thought he was, given how he had been treated by the wizarding world over the last seven years. Maybe they believed if they treated him like a hero, that he would forget the past year and their previous ill treatment of him. Did they really think his memory would be that short? Obviously their memories were if they thought that treating him like a rock star would make him forget how quickly they had turned on him not once but many times. Well that would happen... never

He shook his head, willing to bet that in their minds they were already revising the events of the past seven years and especially this past

one to make themselves look better or at least feel better about their actions. He couldn't help wondering what the next generation of witches and wizards would be taught about Harry Potter and how he defeated Voldemort. By the time the wizarding world was done, he had no doubt that they would have it firmly established that Harry had deliberately allowed himself to be placed in Azkaban to trap and then destroy Voldemort, instead of facing the truth that they had all betrayed him and that no one in the wizarding world had bothered to stand up for him. For them that fantasy would be far more palatable than reality, because they definitely wouldn't want the truth getting out that they could turn on someone who had never done them any intentional harm like a pack of hungry jackals.

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They were halfway through lunch when Dumbledore appeared in the Great Hall followed by Mr. Ollivander who was cradling a long slender bundle wrapped in grey cloth in his arms. Silence began spreading out from the doorway as the students saw the wand maker with his odd bundle and wondered why he had come to Hogwarts. He very rarely left his shop in Diagon Alley. In fact the last time he had been at Hogwarts had been three years ago at the wand weighing for the Tri-Wizard's Tournament.

The students started whispering when they saw the Headmaster and the wand maker approach Harry Potter who was seated at the end of the Gryffindor table.

There was a brief conversation between Harry and the wand maker that was too low for those Gryffindors closest to Harry to make out, but after a few moments, he got up and followed the wand maker out of the Great Hall.

"I am sorry it took so long to finish your staff, Mr. Potter, but some of the cores were very temperamental." Ollivander told him as he searched for the best place to do the binding ritual. "It took a little time to get the thunderbird feather and phoenix ash to work together with the basilisk and horntail scales. And then I went through several clusters of Tourmaline before I found one the staff would accept."

“I thought I’d already chosen a cluster for the cap.”

Ollivander looked a little sheepish. “It shattered the first time it was mounted. While it was responsive to you, it apparently wasn’t compatible with your cores once they were all within the staff.”

Ollivander stopped when he got to a spot halfway between the castle and Hagrid’s hut and Harry stopped right beside him.

Laying down the cloth wrapped bundle, Ollivander undid the wrapping, but didn’t pick the slender ash white staff up. Instead he used the cloth to roll it onto the grassy area between them. “Please extend your wand hand, palm up, Mr. Potter.”

Harry did so and Ollivander pulled a slender dagger from a pocket in his robes.

“I’m going to make a shallow cut across your palm, then I want you to pick up the staff and set the tip of it on the ground.” Ollivander instructed.

“Why?” Harry didn’t sound concerned that what they were doing might be classified as Dark magic, since there was blood involved and the Ministry usually classified any magic that involved blood as Dark, even the ones meant to help.

“In order for you to be able to use the staff at all it must be bound to you.” Ollivander explained. “This requires blood containing your magical signature, so it will know who it belongs to.”

“You make it sound as if this staff were alive and going to become my familiar.” Harry commented.

Ollivander shrugged. “In a way it is. Everything within it and even the staff itself were all living things at one point in time. As for the other, that is equally true, because once this staff is bound to you, no one else will be able to touch it with their bare hands without causing great harm to themselves.” He paused a moment then asked, “Are you ready?”

Harry nodded.

Ollivander dragged the dagger across his palm and blood welled up in the cut it made. Harry waited a moment before kneeling down to pick up the staff.

As soon as the tip of the staff made contact with the ground, those few who were brave enough to follow the pair outside, saw the top of the staff burst into life with deep emerald green fire that flowed down the staff and met a deep golden glow that rose up from the ground. The two merged, encasing Harry in an emerald green and gold swirling sheath that gave off occasional bursts of gold and green sparks.

The minute the staff touched the ground, Harry felt as if there were something he couldn't see staring at him, judging him inside the swirling green and gold shield that surrounded him. It took all his determination not to try and look around to find the source of that feeling.

You do not want us, mage. A chorus of voices spoke in his head. Why did you have us made if you do not want us?

I did not have you made. Harry told the staff at least he assumed it was the staff. You were commissioned by another.

Yet you co-operated in our making, otherwise we would not exist, the staff's chorus told him. No staff can be made for one who is unwilling. So we ask again, Mage, why did you have us made if you do not want us?

Harry mentally shrugged and told the staff I had two main reasons for not wanting a staff. The first being that I have no intention of remaining in the wizarding world after this year is up and a staff would not be needed in the non-magical world.

And the other, prompted the chorus.

There is no one in the wizarding world who could teach me how to use a staff.

We see that you do not intend to give up your magic once you leave the wizarding world, so you will need us to help you keep it under control. The chorus of voices decided.

I've been doing just fine without you so far. Harry pointed out dryly. And I would still need someone to teach me how to work with you.

That is what we are for, the chorus told him. Your reasons while sound have no affect on us. There is much good that can be done by you whether in the magical or non-magical world. We accept that you are ours to guide and teach.

"Great, just what I need," Harry grumbled, "a bossy staff."

He heard the chorus chuckle as the green and gold shield vanished from sight.

"I take it the bonding was successful?" Ollivander inquired.

"I would say so," Harry glared at the staff. "I'm now the proud possessor of a very bossy staff. When you said it was alive, you weren't kidding."

As Ollivander chuckled, Harry caught sight of the small group watching them.

The expression on Harry's face made the group of students scatter to the four winds. For some it was because they didn't want to face his wrath and for the rest, it was because they wanted to be the first to tell their classmates that Harry Potter was the first wizard since Merlin who had a magical staff.

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Professor McGonagall met Minister Fudge and his entourage at the main entrance to Hogwarts. She was relieved that all the students were in class, so they wouldn't know about his arrival.

McGonagall led the group to the chamber off the Great Hall. "Gentlemen and Ladies, if you would please wait in here until we return," she requested. "Minister, the Headmaster has requested that I bring you to his office."

"I have come to see Mr. Potter, not the Headmaster." Fudge told her as he followed her to the Headmaster's office.

"I am aware of that Minister, but as he is presently in class, you will have time to see the Headmaster first." McGonagall told him.

"I know what he intends to try and do Minerva. He wants to try and talk me out of giving Potter the honour due him by awarding him the Order of Merlin." Fudge's tone made it quite clear he had no intention of being talked out of anything.

"Maybe you should listen to his reasons, Minister." The deputy headmistress told him as they came to a halt by the stone gargoyle guarding the Headmaster's office. "Mars bars."

Dumbledore looked up at the knock on his office door. "Enter."

Professor McGonagall came in followed by Minister Fudge.

"Ah Cornelius, good to see you," Dumbledore got to his feet and gestured toward one of the chairs in front of his desk. "Have a seat."

"No thank you, Dumbledore," Fudge declined the offer. "I have some very important business to take care of today with young Mr. Potter, so let's get this over with so I can do what I came to do."

"That is what I wish to speak to you about, Cornelius." Dumbledore told him. "I would like to request that you wait until at least after the first of the year, before you present this award to Harry."

"And why should I want to do that?" Fudge demanded. "We at the Ministry have had numerous owls telling us we should have done something long before now to show the wizarding world's appreciation for his destroying He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. I have also heard rumours that Mr. Potter intends to leave the wizarding

world once this year is over. Right now the rest of the wizarding world doesn't know about his intentions and I intend to see to it that he stays here. He is needed here."

"I am well aware of Mr. Potter's stated intention to leave the wizarding world behind Cornelius." Dumbledore tried to keep calm. "This is what we are trying to avoid. I agree with you that we need him, but he needs us just as badly. However, given his present level of anger over what he sees as the betrayal of the wizarding world, not once but several times, he is unwilling to acknowledge this fact. I also believe that because he has never wanted or sought the spotlight, that young Harry will not be too appreciative of the honour you want to bestow on him. We must work through his feelings of anger and betrayal first before Harry can properly appreciate his place in our society."

"Poppycock! I'm afraid I must disagree with you, Dumbledore." Fudge told him pompously. "What that young man needs is to see how much we... the whole of the wizarding community value him for what he has done in destroying the Dark Lord once and for all. You'll see, once he's had a taste of how much the wizarding world respects and admires him, it will bring young Harry around."

"Mr. Potter has already had a taste of the wizarding world's regard." Dumbledore reminded the Minister. "He has also seen how quickly wizardkind can turn on those it claims to respect... including the Ministry, if you will remember. I think I can safely say that he has no desire to return to that spotlight."

Fudge squirmed for a moment before saying, "nonsense. Young Harry is like any other young man. The attention and regard of young witches will be heady stuff to him and that will bring around, you'll see."

Dumbledore shook his head. "Cornelius, he has already had the attention of a number of the young witches here at the school since his return and he either ignores them or treats them with contempt. Please, I beg of you, put this off for a little while. Give us more time to help Harry work through the issues he has with us before you try and shove him into the spotlight. I'll warn you now, that it is a place he has

never wanted to be and desires even less now. If you force this issue, I'm afraid it will backfire in ways you can't even begin to imagine."

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The Head Boy, Terry Boot walked down to the Care of Magical Creatures class near Hagrid's hut. He'd been sent to fetch Harry Potter for a meeting with the Minister.

The sixth year students were all sweaty and panting, but Terry couldn't see the creature that Hagrid had had them working with.

"Hagrid," he called, taking the half giant's attention away from his students. "I've been sent to fetch Potter and bring him back up to the castle. The Minister has asked to see him."

Hagrid nodded. "Arry, ye need ta go back up ta the castle with Mr. Boot. The Minister would like ta see ya."

Harry stepped out of the group of students without a word and headed toward where Terry was standing. Once he got close enough to be heard without shouting, he asked, "Can I clean up first? I don't think the Minister would like to see me like this."

"I suppose so." Terry nodded. "They didn't say it was urgent, just that he wanted to meet with you as soon as possible. While you're getting cleaned up, I'll let Professor Dumbledore know."

"Where am I supposed to meet him?" Harry wanted to know.

"In the anteroom off the Great Hall," Terry told him. "Oh and when you change, you might want to dress nice."

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"Where is he, Dumbledore?" Fudge hissed under his breath. He could see the waiting reporters were beginning to get impatient.

"Mr. Boot said he needed to clean up after the Care of Magical Creatures class." Dumbledore told him. "From what I understand,

Hagrid had a baby Axex in class today and they are known to be rather rambunctious.”

Just as Fudge was going to ask Dumbledore to have Boot check up on Harry, the door to the anteroom opened and a young man with messy dark hair walked in and Fudge couldn't help noticing the staff he gripped in his right hand.

The conversations of the reporters ground to a halt as they got their first good look at the Boy-Who-Lived. No reporter had really seen him since the day he was sent to Azkaban and any attempts to try and take pictures of him had all failed, because they all came out blurry. He hadn't changed that much from the last time they'd seen him. He was still rather short and very slender, but unlike on previous occasions a few things stood out. His hair while still messy was now shoulder length and he had long bangs covering the trademark scar. Also his hair was now a mixture of black and silver, making it resemble a lake reflecting the night sky. His face was expressionless as he caught sight of the reporters, and his eyes seemed to burn with emerald fire. He was wearing a deep green and silver robe that was opened in the front and underneath it he appeared to be wearing a muggle t-shirt and jeans. Those closest to him could see there was writing on the shirt and it took them a few moments to make it out: 'Don't let your mind wander. It's too little to be out on its own.' They also noted that on the emerald green robes there were three House emblems. They recognized the ones for the Houses of Potter and Black, but they couldn't place the third, even though it looked familiar. They made a note to research that house device because depending on which House it belonged to Potter might wield almost as much power as the Minister, though most of it was bound to be economic.

The item that attracted the most interest among the reporters was the staff he was holding in his right hand. They had heard rumours that he had gotten one, but since they hadn't been allowed on the Hogwarts grounds until now they hadn't been able to confirm it. It wasn't very tall. The deep green, glowing gem cluster mounted on the top of the staff, was just level with the top of Potter's head. The staff itself was ash white in colour and from what those closest to Potter could see there appeared to be intricate grey lines, like Celtic knotwork running all over it.

Following the instructions given by the Minister, they stood back respectfully to let Potter through. Fudge had promised all their questions would be answered by Mr. Potter after he had made his presentation.

“You wanted to see me, Fudge?” The tone of Potter’s voice left little doubt in the mind’s of the reporters, that he was not fond of the Minister.

“Y-yes Harry,” Fudge stammered.

“That’s Mr. Potter to you, Fudge.” Harry corrected, pleased with the effect he was having on the Minister.

“Y-yes, of course,” Fudge had to look away from the icy green eyes that seemed to be looking right through him as if he weren’t there.

He took a deep breath and tried again. “I asked you to meet with me today, because I wish to present you with the highest award that a Wizard or Witch can receive.”

His new aide stepped up and handed Fudge a scroll, which he opened. “For saving the Wizing World from the threat of Lord V-V-Voldemort, it is my privilege to award to Mr. Harry James Potter the Order of Merlin First Class.”

The aide handed Fudge a small opened box, containing a medal. Fudge held this out to Harry, but he made no move to take it.

“I don’t want your stinking medal. I didn’t destroy Moldysorts for you, Fudge, or anybody else in the wizing world.” The contempt in Harry’s cold voice could be heard from one end of the room to the other. The temperature in the room seemed to drop as he continued “I destroyed Voldemort for my parents, for Sirius and Remus. I destroyed him for Cedric and Neville. And I did it for me. I also did it for those in the non-magical world who couldn’t protect themselves from Voldemort and his Deatheaters. If it hadn’t been for the fact that he wanted to destroy them as well as you, I would have let Voldemort raze the wizing community to the ground.”

Fudge's mind raced trying to come up with something to say as one of the reporters spoke up and said. "Surely you don't mean that, Mr. Potter. After all you are a Hero to the people of the wizarding world."

"I rarely say things I don't mean, especially these days." Harry kept his attention on Fudge. "And I'm only a hero until you need a scapegoat. I have been both to the wizarding world and I am tired of it. You are all a bunch of hypocrites, who are led around like sheep believing whatever the Ministry tells you and the rest of the wizarding world follows right along with whatever you put in print." He paused for a moment before continuing. "I have had first hand experiencing with how destructive the lies the Ministry tells, as well as the lies the wizarding press is willing to print can be."

"Come now Mr. Potter, the Ministry does the best it can for everyone." Fudge found his voice. He was not going to let this boy wreck his career or topple the Ministry, no matter how powerful he might be. Public opinion still carried a lot of weight and it favoured the Ministry and the stability it created. "We are only human and I grant you that sometimes mistakes are made, but we correct them as soon as we can."

"You are only human," the look that Harry gave the Minister had him cringing and wishing he had listened to Dumbledore. "I have my doubts about that. Human beings learn from their mistakes, or at least they try to, but the Ministry and the Wizarding world just keep repeating theirs. And none of you have owned up to or corrected your mistakes. Actually I should rephrase that last part. You do sometimes try and correct your mistakes, but only after it's too fucking late for the person you have wronged. And then only after your face has been rubbed in the fact that you were wrong."

"What mistakes has the Ministry made that they haven't owned up to?" Harry recognized that voice as Rita Skeeter's.

"Ah, Rita, if you only knew how long I have waited for this day." Harry smiled as he turned to face her. "You are one of the ones that caused the most damage during my fourth year. If you hadn't written all those nasty articles of yours about how I was only trying to get attention and

that I was delusional and dangerous, then the Minister might have believed me when I told him Voldemort was back. I do say might, because this idiot was determined not to have his calm and ordered world disturbed by the truth. Then there were the articles you wrote about me for the trial. They were pretty much in the same vein as the stuff you wrote in my fourth year. I would have thought you learned your lesson after Hermione found out your little secret, but I guess that was too much to hope for.”

“What secret?” One of the other reporters demanded.

Harry smirked as he told them. “Didn’t you know? Well since Rita is so fond of the truth and getting everything out into the open I suppose it is only fair that you know.” He enjoyed watching Skeeter’s face suddenly grow pale. “ Rita Skeeter is an unregistered animagus, a beetle to be precise. That is how she has been able to get into places she is not supposed to be in and write stories with her own special slant on the truth with information she shouldn’t have had. But then the truth is all relative, isn’t it, Rita?”

“And to answer your question Rita, actually it’s the wizarding world as a whole and not just the Ministry that hasn’t owned up to these mistakes, but we’ll let Fudge here see if he can answer this question for you all right.” Harry turned his attention back to the Minister.

“I don’t know what mistakes you are talking about.” Fudge glared at Potter, wondering how he could stop this debacle from happening.

Harry made a tsk-tsk sound as he shook his head. “Minister... Minister, you might want to see someone about your poor memory. We’ll get into the errors you personally made in a bit, but right now let me quiz you on some history. And by the way if you reporters know the answer, you can speak up too. Some of you look old enough to know. So Minister today’s question is: ‘In the past say oh about a hundred years, how many witches and or wizards were sent to Azkaban without a trial, or else got the same sort of trial I got, where not all the resources that the wizarding world has available for getting to the truth were used?’ And for your bonus question: ‘Of those that were treated that way, how many of them was the truth not found out

about, until they were either dead or had their souls sucked out by Dementors?"

"There have only been two," the Minister told him told him confidently. "You and Black and we've made reparations for both of you."

Harry made a buzzing sound and then said, "wrong answer. And Sirius was dead by the time you admitted he was innocent." He looked over at the reporters. "Would any of you care to prove you're smarter than the Minister?"

There was silence as the reporters stared at each other, wondering just what the Boy-Who-Lived was talking about.

"What about you Dumbledore?" Harry inquired. "Surely you know. I mean after all you have been alive for more than a hundred years. Hell for all I know you were probably at the trials."

"Hagrid," Dumbledore offered.

"Yes, there was Hagrid." Harry agreed. "He was sent to Azkaban not once but twice. And the second time he didn't even receive the courtesy of a trial. The last time, I believe, it was because you Minister said something along the lines of: 'we must be seen to be doing something' when the Chamber of Secrets had been opened again by Ginny Weasley who was stupid enough to write in a cursed diary and allow the spirit of Voldemort to possess her. I could understand a muggle-born making the mistake of writing in an enchanted diary, since they wouldn't know to be cautious around such an item, but child raised in the wizarding world should have had more sense."

Harry paused for a moment allowing that information to sink into the reporter's minds and send them frantically writing. "I noticed though that neither you nor the Ministry have made an effort to get Hagrid a new wand. A wand he is entitled to owing to the fact that he was innocent and shouldn't have had his wand snapped in the first place, but we are getting off topic. Keep thinking Headmaster, there is still at least one more to be accounted for."

Dumbledore looked thoughtful, but he also seemed to be unable to come up with the last one Potter was referring to.

“Let me give you a little hint shall I,” Harry offered, “Weyland.”

“Kerr Weyland,” the Minister spat. “He was guilty on all counts and it was proven using all methods available.”

“I’m afraid I must agree with the Minister on that Harry,” Dumbledore confirmed the information Fudge had provided. “Kerr Weyland was an ardent supporter of Voldemort, in fact he was one of the first to join him.”

“And whose fault is that.” Harry spat out, glaring at the Headmaster and then turning his attention to the room at large.

The reporters found they couldn't meet his gaze, because his emerald eyes seemed to sear them to their very souls and they found they didn't like the feeling.

Harry continued his little history lesson. “It was the wizarding world’s actions with regards to his father that led Kerr Weyland into Voldemort’s camp. The Ministry had his father convicted and Kissed and it was only after he was Kissed, that they found out that he wasn’t guilty. It had been someone else who resembled him, but did the wizarding world make reparations to his family? No! Did anyone help his children given that their mother was dead? No! Take them in? No! He and his sisters got swept under the rug to the point where not even those who were alive at the time remember what they did to the Weyland family or I should say what they didn’t do to correct the mistake they made.”

“What is the point you are trying to make, Mr. Potter?” Dumbledore asked.

“What is the point I am trying to make?” Harry parroted back at the Headmaster. “There is a saying in the muggle world. ‘Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely’. Would you agree with that statement, Headmaster?”

"I suppose so," Dumbledore responded cautiously.

"Then what I am saying is that the wizarding world is corrupt, because a number of you see nothing wrong with the abuse of muggles, or of those who are weaker in power than yourselves. You all see yourselves as somehow better because you can work magic and they can't." Harry's gaze swept the room before returning to Fudge. "And Fudge in particular has abused his power in ways that would remind any muggle or even the muggle-born, if they bothered to think about it, of Hitler."

"Mr. Potter," Dumbledore spoke up trying to get the situation under control. "Surely you are not comparing the Minister of Magic to the insane muggle who was under Grindelwald's control during the thirties and forties."

"Oh, but I am." Harry confirmed. "He not only had Barty Crouch Jr, who could have given testimony about the fact that Voldemort was indeed back Kissed without a trial I might add." Harry looked thoughtful for a moment. "Would that make him number five to be treated to the wizarding world's peculiar form of justice? Maybe not, given that he was indeed guilty of supporting the Dark Lord. Fudge also spent the whole of my fifth year here at Hogwarts doing everything he could to squash the truth. Edict after edict that controlled what we could do, how we could assemble, even what we were allowed to say or read. Manipulating the press for his own ends."

Harry shook his head. "No, I should rephrase that because they were his willing accomplices in trying to destroy my character and good name after all just so they could sell more newspapers. They didn't care who they hurt as long as they could make a profit out of it and still don't for that matter." He glared at the assembled reporters for a moment, and they wouldn't meet his stare. After a moment his attention returned to Fudge and Dumbledore. "He was a dictator in every sense of the word and it took Voldemort getting in his face in the very halls of the Ministry of Magic before he would even consider that he was wrong. And even then he didn't remove Umbridge from her position of authority in the Ministry."

Potter paused for breath. "He was more concerned with retaining his position as Minister than in doing the right thing. Even now, I'll bet that's what this award ceremony is meant to do, solidify his position, because it is probably very shaky right now. If he is seen honouring the Hero of the Wizarding World then maybe he can hang on to his job. Well no thanks Minister. I've had my fill of being used by you and the Wizarding world. From now on you can sort out your own messes. Leave me out of it."

Harry stormed out of the room before another word could be said.

One Down

Hermione came into the common room from the Gryffindor Head Girl's suite with an armload of books.

From her seat in an armchair near the fireplace, Ginny could see that she was looking around for a place to sit. While the armchair across from Ginny was unoccupied, Hermione clearly wanted or needed to sit at a table.

Ginny stiffened when she realised that her friend had spotted Harry sitting at a table in a slightly shadowed corner of the Gryffindor common room. Ginny had been keeping an eye on that table and had watched him drive off several Gryffindors who tried to join him there, no matter what year they were in, and couldn't help wondering if Hermione would have better or worse luck than the others if she tried to join him. Probably worse, Ginny reflected as she saw Hermione nod and head over to where he was seated.

Harry ignored Hermione as she set her books down in the only clear space available on the table and set her school bag on the floor. It was when she started to clear a space for herself by moving his scattered books into a pile that he started paying attention to what she was doing.

Ginny noticed that Harry did nothing to stop Hermione, until she opened one of his books and started looking through it. Hermione's curiosity must have gotten the better of her, Ginny thought as she watched Harry snatch the book out of her grasp before she'd had a chance to look at more than a couple of pages.

In the sudden silence that filled the common room, everyone heard Harry growl, "I warned you, Granger, to keep your nose out of my life and out of my business."

"I was just curious about what you were reading." Hermione tried to defend her actions. "Those didn't look like school books."

"And they aren't," Harry told her. "But you lost any right you may have had to poke your nose into my affairs last year, remember. Then

again the smartest witch of the age seems to be remarkably dumb, because she can't remember what she has been told several times by me. So perhaps you need a more permanent reminder of what can happen if you continue to try and poke your nose into my business."

Ginny had trouble seeing the gesture that Harry made in Hermione's direction before he waved his hand over the table in front of him. The books and papers on the table shrunk down and flew into his open book bag. Throwing the book bag over his shoulder, Harry told Hermione, "you can have the table," before leaving the common room.

Ginny saw the look of anguish on Hermione's face as she stared after the departing Harry. Closing her book, Ginny went over to join Hermione. Wanting to cheer her up, Ginny told her, "It'll get better. You'll see."

"I'm beginning to doubt that," Hermione disagreed. "Harry and I were the best of friends for almost six years, but I destroyed that friendship by not being willing to give him the benefit of the doubt. I should have known better. The story was too pat, especially given the way Sirius had been framed, but I ignored that in favour of believing the Headmaster could never be wrong."

"Harry's got a lot of anger to work through before he will forgive what we did." Ginny told her, unwilling to accept that she might never get back the man she loved and wanted.

Laying out her books, Hermione reminded her, "Harry seems to be unwilling to let go of his anger. I'm fairly certain that one of the reasons Dumbledore forced him to come back here was so he could work through that anger toward us. He... I want Harry to be able to move on... with us as friends again. I want him to be able to get on with his life in the wizarding world."

"It's only been a few months," Ginny pointed out, sitting down opposite her. "It's just going to take time. What we need to do is continue to show him that we are here for him if he wants to talk... or anything."

Hermione noticed the blush that spread over Ginny's face. "You still want him don't you?"

"I have ever since I saw him that first time in King's Cross Station." Ginny told her.

Before Ginny had a chance to say anything more, Hermione let out a shriek as she stared at the page of the open book in front of her. The Common room fell silent and students came stumbling out of the dorms, wand out looking for the threat. Ginny studied the book lying in front of Hermione, trying to figure out what would have caused her to panic that way. Hermione was usually so calm and unflappable, but she couldn't see anything that would have produce this reaction.

"What's wrong?" Ginny asked.

"Can't you see?" Hermione gestured at the open book. "Harry has destroyed my book."

Picking up the heavy book, Ginny examined it carefully and found nothing wrong with it. Setting the book back down in front of Hermione, she asked. "What's wrong with it?"

"It's blank!" Hermione screamed. "He erased my book!"

Hermione opened another book then another. "HE ERASED ALL MY BOOKS!"

Ginny looked at the books completely baffled. The words were there. She could see them. True she couldn't understand some of the ones she read, but they were there.

Ginny slapped Hermione's face hard. Once the older girl was shocked into silence, she told her, "Hermione, the words are still there. Harry did nothing to damage your books."

"No they are not." Hermione insisted, looking down at the blank page before her.

Ginny picked up the book and began reading from the open page. "Inguz is the rune of Completion and Fertility. The presence of this Rune in any grouping or reading, suggests that tasks that have been initiated will come to completion. This Runic symbol is commonly associated with the Norse Gods Ing and Frey."

Ginny stopped at that point and looked at Hermione. The older girl had gone whiter than Nearly Headless Nick. "What's wrong Hermione?"

"Harry did something to my eyes," Hermione's voice was barely above a whisper. "I can't see anything on any of the pages of these books."

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Harry returned to the Gryffindor common room a few minutes before curfew. Instead of the older students studying that he expected to find on his return, Harry saw that Professor McGonagall was seated in the armchair near the fire that faced the portrait hole.

"Professor," he greeted her as he headed toward the stairs for the dorms.

"I would like a word with you, Mr. Potter." Professor McGonagall told him.

Turning around, Harry came over to stand by the fire. "Very well ma'am. What do you want to talk about?"

"First of all, where have you been?" McGonagall wanted to know. "We've had the prefects looking for you for several hours."

"I went to the only place in this whole damn school where I wouldn't be bothered by busybodies and those trying to apologise for things that can never be forgiven." Harry told her.

McGonagall didn't know how to respond to that in a way that wouldn't make him angrier and prevent her from getting him to undo the spell he'd placed on Miss Granger, so she decided to come straight to the

point of why she was waiting here for him. "What did you do to Miss Granger? And when will it wear off?"

The smile that appeared on Harry's face worried Professor McGonagall. "I got tired of her poking her nose into my business. I told her several times to leave me alone unless it had to do with school business, but she couldn't seem to remember that simple warning, so I gave her something else to think about. As for when it will wear off, it won't. She will never be able to read another word, unless I choose to remove the spell."

McGonagall got to her feet. "How dare you interfere with another student's ability to learn?! One hundred points from Gryffindor for deliberate assault upon a fellow student and member of your own house. I demand that you remove the spell at once."

"You demand..." Harry laughed. "You demand.... oh that's very good. Why should I do anything you tell me to do? You are not my mother, nor are you responsible for me. If you were, I would have taken whatever steps were necessary to get the ties between us severed... ma'am."

McGonagall flinched at the contempt in the last word.

"When will you learn that your opinion no longer matters to me?" Harry continued as if he were discussing the weather. "It hasn't since the day you stood by and watched as the students in your house destroyed all the best memories of my life. Lord knows I had none during my time with the Dursleys, but then again no one in the wizarding world gave a damn about how their hero was treated when he wasn't in the wizarding world. Come to think of it, they didn't give a damn about how I was treated while I was in the wizarding world either. All they cared about was that I destroy Voldemort for them, so they could go back to their happy little hypocritical lives with their blinders fully intact and their brains turned off. To all of you I was nothing more than a weapon to be used against Voldemort."

McGonagall finally found her voice. "I cared about you and still do care. I care about all the students in my house, Mr. Potter. You are all my family and each other's family. I never thought I would live to see

the day when a member of the noble House of Gryffindor would deliberately attack another.”

“Then where have you been for the last twenty plus years, Professor?! Living in a bubble? Or maybe under a rock?” Harry’s voice was filled with venom. “Have you forgotten about Peter Pettigrew, the Gryffindor Deatheater, who betrayed my parents? And let us not forget Percy Weasley who was both Prefect and Head Boy but yet he also joined Moldyshorts and killed Neville for the Dark Wanker. And what about last year, you stood there and watched as the members of your so-called noble House burned up the only memories I would ever have of my parents and godfather? You know you should really think about changing the emblem of your house from the lion to the jackal, madam, because during my time here at this school I have seen Gryffindors turn on each other at the slightest provocation and do it more often than the Slytherins.”

McGonagall tried several times to respond to those accusations, but couldn’t come up with anything to refute what he had said, given that it was the truth after all. Peter Pettigrew a fellow Gryffindor had betrayed his parents and not once but several times the members of Gryffindor House had turned against Mr. Potter and shunned or outright attacked him, while she did nothing to prevent it. True in some cases she did it to follow Albus Dumbledore’s orders, because he said it would make the boy stronger and a leader who would be needed when the Dark Lord came back. He needed to be strong if the wizarding world was to survive.

Then there was Percy Weasley, whom she never would’ve suspected of joining the Dark Lord, but he had proved to be a bitter disappointment, both to her and to his family. At his closed trial last month, he had been condemned to death for his numerous crimes. No coercion had been necessary, to get him to list his various crimes, though once he had offered to list his crimes, they had given him veritaserum to make sure they got all of them. He had done it rather than face the prospect of having to deal with Harry Potter in an open courtroom. Now all they had to do was figure out how to kill him, given that there were no longer any Dementors to give him the Kiss, thanks to Potter. The Ministry was currently debating making the Killing Curse a legal form of execution, though McGonagall doubted

anything would come of that, given that it had been an Unforgivable curse for longer than she'd been alive.

Finally realizing she wasn't going to get anywhere by trying to appeal to a sense of House loyalty, McGonagall decided to see what kind of bargain it would take to get him to undo the spell. "Mr. Potter, what will it take to get you to remove the spell you placed on Miss Granger? You may not care about your magical education, but she does. And your actions right now are no better than theirs were last year. You have taken away something she values. We may not be able to restore all of what was destroyed, but there is no need for you to sink as low as they did. You are better than that."

"A pity that didn't occur to you last year before you believed me capable of murdering one of my friends. Or before you allowed your House to set fire to my things." The expression on Harry's face was one of contempt, but then he looked thoughtful.

After a few moments silence, he told her, "All right I'll remove it... but only if she meets my conditions."

Instantly suspicious, McGonagall asked, "What conditions?"

"Oh, don't worry, it won't be anything dangerous." Harry laughed. "She simply has to get up in front of the whole school at dinnertime on Friday and swear the magically binding oath I will give you and she will have to swear it on her magic...Oh and she can't alter the oath in any way."

"Why not tomorrow at breakfast or even right now, in front of me?" McGonagall demanded. "Why make her suffer for a whole week?"

Harry's face took on an ugly expression. "Don't talk to me about suffering. She won't be suffering. Granger doesn't know the first thing about suffering and neither do you. Suffering is spending a year in Azkaban with the Dementors when you are innocent. Suffering is spending the first ten years of your life sleeping in a cupboard and being beaten or starved for things your cousin did or for working accidental magic. Suffering is watching your godfather fall through the

Veil in the Department of Mysteries and knowing it was at least partly your fault he was there.”

Harry stormed off up the stairs, before McGonagall come up with anything to say.

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The rumour mill at Hogwarts being one of the best in the wizarding world, before Friday, every student knew that Harry Potter had cursed his former best friend Hermione Granger so that she could no longer see the words on a printed page and why. Nor, as they also found out, could she read handwritten notes, hers or anyone else's. The rumour mill also reported that not even Dumbledore could figure out what spell Potter had used and all possible counter curses had been tried to no avail.

The Ravenclaws and Slytherins had enjoyed watching Granger get twitchier and twitchier as the week progressed because she wasn't able to read. Granger attended classes, but they couldn't understand why she was doing so. It wasn't like she would be able to get anything out of the classes, until she was able to read again. The teachers had tried to find readers among the Ravenclaws for her, so she wouldn't fall too far behind, as well as someone to proofread the homework she had done with a dictaphone, but they always found valid excuses not to do it.

None of the Slytherin or Ravenclaw students were really very fond of her. The Slytherins disliked her because she was constantly beating their scores. And the Ravenclaws because of the arrogance with which she paraded her knowledge and her certainty that all the answers in life could be found in books. They knew this was not the case. The Ravenclaws knew that there were always new things to be learned and that old information sometimes had to be revised or eliminated when some new fact came along to contradict it. It was why they rarely if ever put themselves in a position of power in the Ministry or anywhere else. They disliked looking foolish like Minister Fudge was looking right now after his blunders with Potter and his own aide.

The Ravenclaw and Slytherin students had also enjoyed watching the show put on by the other Gryffindors and Potter as they made repeated attempts to get him to undo the curse he'd placed on Granger. It had been interesting watching him cut them off with a few well-chosen words. Ron Weasley, Granger's boyfriend, had been especially persistent and for two days had sported skin of deep green and hair of silver as well as a tendency to spout complimentary things about Slytherins whenever one happened to be nearby. The Slytherins were quick to pick up on this and had hung around Weasley to make this happen.

Because Granger was unable to read the written word a number of the sixth and seventh year Gryffindor students, her boyfriend Weasley included, had been forced into being readers for her and she had gotten very whiny and snappish when they didn't do it properly. Most of them refused to do it again after the first time and Professor McGonagall had no way of requiring students from other houses to do it. A couple of the more compassionate Ravenclaws had offered to proofread Granger's homework for the classes they shared with her on Wednesday, but they quickly left, and refused to do so again when Granger snapped at them they were wrong about an error in her homework.

The Ravenclaws also couldn't help shaking their heads in dismay at the stupidity of the Gryffindors. They kept trying to make Harry Potter forgive them on their timetable and not on his. The Gryffindors kept saying things like 'get over it', 'it's done and you need to move on'. The Ravenclaws however, or at least a majority of them had taken a different approach. While they were not experts on things involving emotion like the Hufflepuffs who were also being frozen out by Potter they did agree with them on one thing. The forgiveness, if it was going to happen at all, had to be on Potter's timetable not theirs. No one could maintain this level of anger forever, unless it was being stoked constantly and the Gryffindors were certainly stoking the fires that kept his anger going. About the only person in the whole school who could approach Potter for anything even remotely resembling a polite conversation, was Loony Lovegood, but then again, that girl wouldn't know a snub if it bit her on the ass.

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On Wednesday before he could get out of Transfiguration class, Harry heard McGonagall call out, "Potter, please remain behind. Mr. Creevy, tell Hagrid that Mr. Potter will be late to class."

Sighing, Harry turned away from the door and went to lean up against the nearest wall, his arms folded across his chest.

Once the classroom was empty, Professor McGonagall told him, "The Headmaster would like to see you in his office."

"When?" Harry asked not at all pleased by the prospect.

"Now."

Sighing again Harry followed the Transfiguration teacher up to the Headmaster's office. "Any idea about what he wants to discuss?"

"The Headmaster did not take me into his confidence about why he wants to see you, Mr. Potter." McGonagall told him crisply.

Probably wants to talk me out of making Granger swear that oath. Harry mused as they arrived in front of the gargoyle that guarded Dumbledore's office.

"Pepper imps," McGonagall told the gargoyle and it moved aside.

After waiting several minutes for the young man to go up the revolving stairs, McGonagall finally ordered, "Go on up, Potter. You don't want to keep the Headmaster waiting.

Harry gave her a sour look before heading toward the revolving staircase. McGonagall thought she heard him mutter, "brown noser," as he passed by her.

When he reached the top of the stairs, Harry leaned back against the wall to wait. He was curious to see just how long it would take for Dumbledork's patience to run out and for him to open the door himself. He was quite content to stay there all day. He had nothing better to do with his time after all it wasn't like he wanted to go to any

of his classes and if there was one thing Azkaban had taught him, it was patience.

His watch showed that fifteen minutes had passed before the door to Dumbledore's office opened. He would have thought the old man could hold out longer, but apparently not.

"Come in, Harry." Dumbledore requested as he took a step back from the doorway.

"It's Mr. Potter to you." Harry reminded the old man.

Looking disappointed, Dumbledore repeated, "Come in, Mr. Potter."

Harry settled in the nearest chair and didn't say another word.

Dumbledore went and sat down behind his desk. Waving his wand a tea set appeared on the desk and Harry could see steam rising from the teapot. Picking up the pot and a cup, Dumbledore asked, "Would you like some tea?"

Harry shook his head no and continued to stare at the picture on the wall of Phineas Nigellus, a former Headmaster of Hogwarts and the great great uncle of his godfather Sirius Black.

Dumbledore slowly sipped his tea waiting for young Potter to speak. Despite the fact that Harry had made him come and open the door when he wouldn't knock, Dumbledore knew the boy was generally impatient as all the young were. It was only with maturity that one acquired patience.

Dumbledore was on his second cup of tea and Harry still hadn't taken his attention off the picture of Sirius Black's uncle. Phineas had spoken to the boy several times requesting he look at something else, but Harry just continued to stare at him without saying a word.

Finally Phineas had had enough and tried to leave his picture and found he could not. Turning his attention to the current Headmaster, he demanded, "Dumbledore, make him release me."

Dumbledore turned to face Phineas' portrait. "Make who release you?"

"Potter. Somehow he has managed to confine me to my portrait."

"Mr. Potter, have you confined Phineas to his portrait?" Dumbledore asked the young man.

"Yes," Harry told him.

"Why did you do that?" Dumbledore wanted to know.

"Partly because I didn't like the way he is always looking down his nose at me and partly because I wanted to see if I could." Harry told the Headmaster, taking his attention off the portrait for a moment.

"Why would you want to confine the people in the portraits to their frames, Mr. Potter?" Dumbledore asked.

"Because I'm tired of being spied on by you through them." Harry told him. "I don't know if the other students have figured out how you always know what's going on but I did. I had a lot of time to think in Azkaban, when the Dementors weren't trying to drive me crazy."

"I do not use the portraits to spy on the students, or anyone else for that matter." Dumbledore denied.

The expression on Harry's face told the Headmaster he was not believed, even before he said, "Pull the other one, it's got bells on it."

"Harry, please release Phineas." Dumbledore requested, earning himself another death glare from the young man opposite him.

Turning his attention back to the man in the portrait, Harry said, "Hear me, Nigellus. I expect you to pass the word to the other portraits in this school. If any of you try and spy on me, I will confine all of you to the frames you are currently in. Is that clear?"

"You can't stop us from watching over Hogwarts and those within her." Phineas countered haughtily.

"I intend no harm to Hogwarts or those within her as long as they leave me alone." Harry countered icily. "I suggest you remember that and if you want to have an idea of what I can do to your kind, I suggest you go to Grimmauld Place and take a look at the portrait of Sirius' mother."

"Mr Potter, do not threaten the portraits with harm." Dumbledore warned him.

Harry gave him a sour look. "As long as they stay out of my business, they won't have to worry about what I might or might not do."

Before the situation could get completely out of his control, Dumbledore brought up the matter he had wanted to speak to Harry about. "Mr. Potter, I asked you here to request that you remove the curse you placed on Miss Granger, without making her swear that oath you wrote."

"No."

"Why do you want to cut Miss Granger out of your life?" Dumbledore wanted to know. "She is your friend..."

"Was." Harry interrupted. "She was my friend. She is no longer and will never be again."

"Harry, you can't let this anger consume you." Dumbledore began. "That is part of what lead Voldemort down the Dark road he travelled. We all want to help you work through your anger, but you have to let us in before the healing can begin. You shouldn't cut yourself off from those you once called friends. Angry and alone is no way for anyone to live."

"I've been alone all my life," Harry countered. "Why should the future be any different?"

Dumbledore sighed, knowing he was responsible for Harry's feeling like he had always been alone. Hindsight as the muggles had a habit of saying is always twenty/twenty. He'd never understood that until

now. Now when he looked back, he could see all the mistakes he had made with young Harry, when at the time he had thought it was the best for all concerned, including young Harry Potter. He regretted his choice of leaving Harry with the Dursleys but it had been the only way of keeping him safe, even though he knew they wouldn't love him. No, if he were honest with himself even though he knew they would hate him. He had believed that once Harry arrived among his own kind that they could make up for what Harry hadn't gotten from the Dursleys, but that hadn't quite worked out the way he'd planned either.

Shaking his head slightly, Dumbledore returned to the topic at hand. "Harry..."

"Potter." The tone of the young man's voice warned him not to use his given name again.

"Miss Granger made mistakes." The Headmaster tried again. "She is trying to make up for them."

"How? By poking her nose into my private business?" Harry couldn't believe the old man was this dense. "I told her to keep her nose out of my business and I would be civil to her as long as it concerned school matters. But noooo, Miss Know-It-All has to know everything, even when it isn't her business. I gave her two more warnings, when she crossed the line, but she still couldn't seem to get it through her head, not to poke her damn nose in my business. Now she is learning her lesson and once she has sworn her oath on Friday, I will return what was taken from her. I won't have to worry about dealing with her attempts to regain my friendship any more because her own oath will keep her in check and if it doesn't then she can just return to the muggle world."

"Potter, we lost too many witches and wizards during both of Voldemort's reigns of terror." Dumbledore pointed out calmly. "We can't afford to lose a young witch of Miss Granger's calibre. Please reconsider the terms of the oath you want her to swear."

"No."

“Why do you want to drive her from our world?”

“I don’t care whether she leaves your world or not.” Harry felt pleased at the disappointed look on Dumbledore’s face. Get used to it old man. This time I’m the one in charge, not you. “I noticed a long time ago, that you have to practically hit Granger in the head with a brick, to get something she doesn’t want to think about driven home. Well this is my brick and from now on any time she thinks about coming near me, that brick will be beating her over the head, reminding her of what it will cost her if she does.”

“There are easier ways to get your point across.” Dumbledore pointed out. “Miss Granger is an intelligent and reasonable young woman.”

The expression on Harry’s face was one of disbelief. “Easier ways to get the point across to the witch who is still trying to free house elves, even though she has been told repeatedly by them they don’t want to be free and that if they are freed that they will die. Do you know that to the House elves, she is Voldemort. They speak of her with fear in their voices, calling Granger “Her” and “She”. They avoid her like the plague. She’s been told repeatedly to give it up that she is causing more harm than good and that she is terrorising the House elves, but will she give it up... nooooooooooooo. She thinks she knows better than everybody else what’s best for the House elves and she is acting the same way towards me. I told her to leave me alone, unless it concerned school business, but has she... nooooo. That is not intelligence it is pigheadedness. Well she has brought this on herself and now she will pay for what she has done. I will not alter one word of that oath. If she doesn’t want to swear it, then send her home, because I doubt she will be of much use to the wizarding world, unless you want to turn her into a brood mare, and I think if you tried that, you and whoever was her husband would soon live to regret it.”

“Is there anything that can be done to change your mind?” Dumbledore wanted to know.

Harry didn’t even have to think about that. “No.”

“Potter, there is still time.” Dumbledore made one last attempt anyway. “Please, I’m begging you, reconsider what you are asking Miss Granger to do. Don’t cut her out of your life. You may find out that you actually want her there and then it will be too late to get her back.”

“She’s the one who cut me out of her life, remember Headmaster.” Harry reminded him. “When she thought I was guilty, she couldn’t get rid of me fast enough. Now that she knows I’m innocent, she wants it all to be forgiven. Well that isn’t going to happen and you and she had better just get used to the idea.”

When Dumbledore couldn’t think of anything else to say, Harry asked, “Are we done yet?”

Dumbledore nodded.

Harry left the room without a backward glance.

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Dinner on Friday was nearing its end when Professor McGonagall tapped on the side of her glass to silence the Great Hall.

In the ensuing silence, Dumbledore got to his feet and said, “May I have your attention please. A request has been made that you all act as witnesses to a magically binding oath.” He paused for a moment an expression of disappointment on his face. “Miss Granger, Mr. Potter, if you would both please come forward.”

The silence in the Great Hall was such that everyone could hear the tapping of the butt of Potter’s staff. Some of the students who shared classes with Potter also noticed that instead of having a flickering light as it usually did, the deep green stone on the top of Potter’s staff had a steady pulsing glow almost like a heartbeat. All the students watched Potter and Granger walk up to stand in front of the Head table. Some of the smaller students had to crane their necks to see what was going on.

“Face each other,” Dumbledore instructed.

Once they had done so, the Headmaster told Hermione, "you may begin whenever you are ready, Miss Granger."

There were several minutes of silence before Hermione looked at her former best friend and begged. "Please, don't make me do this."

Those closest to the Head table saw that Potter's face was a blank mask, showing no emotion whatsoever and his voice made it clear to the rest of the room as he said flatly. "The choice is yours, Granger. I know that McGonagall told you my terms. You can take them or leave things the way they are."

Tears filled Hermione's eyes as she took out her wand and laid it across the palms of her hands. "I, Hermione Jane Granger, do hereby solemnly swear upon my magic that I will never deliberately approach Harry James Potter or deliberately speak with him ever again. The day I do so, I will lose my magic."

The students in the Great Hall gasped as a blue aura surrounded Granger and it seemed to be reaching out tendrils toward Potter.

"I, Harry James Potter, do hereby accept the magically binding vow of Hermione Jane Granger to never deliberately come near me or speak to me ever again. And I return that which you value over everything else in your life."

As soon as Potter finished speaking, a deep green aura surrounded him and tendrils flowed outward to meet the questing ones from Granger. As soon as they made contact, they seemed to tie themselves together and then both auras vanished.

"So mote it be," Dumbledore intoned and they could hear the note of sadness in his voice. "The oath has been given and accepted and it has been witnessed by those assembled here. I only hope that one day you do not regret was done here today, Mr. Potter."

"I doubt I ever will." Harry told him before returning to his seat at the end of the Gryffindor table.

AN: I got the idea of what to do to Hermione from an old Twilight Zone episode where a guy finally had all the time in the world to read as much as he wanted, but just as he was getting started, he broke his only pair of glasses and without them he was blind as a bat. I also know that for me taking away my ability to read, would be a truly horrible punishment.

A Few Unpleasant Facts

“Headmaster, I would like to speak with you regarding Mr. Potter.” McGonagall told him once the other Heads of House had left the Headmaster’s office after their weekly Friday meeting.

“What else has he done, Minerva?” Dumbledore was beginning to regret forcing young Harry to go back to Hogwarts, but he wasn’t going to give up on or abandon the boy, not this time. Aside from the fact that the wizarding world still needed Harry Potter, he had no intention of making the same mistake he’d made last year, the one that had led to Harry’s incarceration in Azkaban.

“He hasn’t done anything else Albus. It’s what he might do next that has me concerned, given his actions toward Miss Granger. Not to mention the oath he made her swear that is going to force her to stay away from him or risk losing her magic. I know it was your intention to try and get him to forgive his friends and now that door has been slammed in Miss Granger’s face forever.” McGonagall told him.

“Not quite, Minerva.” Dumbledore told her. “The oath doesn’t block Mr. Potter from talking to her and if he does, then it will not cause the loss of Miss Granger’s magic. It is possible that we may be able to convince him to release her from the oath he had her swear.”

“That will never happen.” McGonagall snorted. “It has been almost two months, Headmaster, and I see no signs of his anger diminishing. At best he ignores his fellow students and at his worst he is so contemptuous of them that they want very little to do with him. I don’t think your plan is going to work Albus. If it were we should be seeing signs of it by now.”

Dumbledore sighed and got up from his desk to stare out the window for a moment. “He just needs time, Minerva.”

“How much time and is he to be given this time at the expense of the other students?” McGonagall wanted to know. “Because I must tell you Headmaster the first year Gryffindors will have nothing to do with him. They stay as far away from him as possible and a number of

them were quite pleased that they were going to be in the same House as Harry Potter until they met him.”

“Has he harmed them?” Dumbledore asked quickly.

“If you mean has he done anything similar to what he did to Miss Granger, then no, but he treats them with outright contempt and they had nothing to do with what happened last year. He is tarring them with the same brush that he has used for the second through seventh year students and they don’t deserve that Albus. They are innocent of the wrongdoings of their fellow Gryffindors.” McGonagall told him. “I never thought I would ever say this, but it may be in the best interests of all if Mr. Potter were segregated from his fellow Gryffindors, if only for their safety.”

Dumbledore shook his head. “I’m sorry Minerva, but that can’t happen. Also I doubt that Mr. Potter will do them any physical harm, unless they first try and harm him. He may be an angry young man, but he still has a strong sense of right and wrong and there are lines even he will not cross.”

“What do you call what he did to Miss Granger if not physical harm?” McGonagall couldn’t believe how calmly the Headmaster was taking this.

“No it was not,” Dumbledore disagreed. “The harm he did was emotional and maybe mental. If he had wanted to, I think Mr. Potter could have easily blinded Miss Granger. He did block her ability to see the written word and for an avid reader like Miss Granger that was far more painful. I do have to agree with Mr. Potter about one thing. Miss Granger is a very stubborn young woman and it is very hard to get her to change her mind about some things. Also she is thoroughly convinced that she knows what’s best for those around her and that she has the right to meddle in their lives.”

“Hmm,” McGonagall mused with her first smile of the evening, “that sounds an awful lot like some one I know.”

Dumbledore drew himself up and tried to look affronted, “I have no idea who you could be taking about.”

“Are you sure?” McGonagall teased, her grin broadening.

“Can we get back to the matter at hand?” Dumbledore requested. “As I was saying, all Mr. Potter did was cause Miss Granger severe emotional distress probably equal to what she caused him when she destroyed the photo album containing the only pictures he had of his parents.”

“It was far greater surely Albus!” McGonagall protested. “The punishment didn’t fit the crime simply for picking up a book off a table.”

“But ultimately, I don’t think that’s what he was punishing her for. I think that was just the trigger. I think he was punishing her for destroying his photo album.” Dumbledore countered. “She knew how much those pictures meant to him and she also knew how much it would hurt him to see those pictures destroyed by someone he thought of as his friend. By the same token, Mr. Potter knows how much Miss Granger loves to read and knew how much it would hurt her to not be able to do that.”

McGonagall conceded that he was probably right. “I still think his final punishment far outweighed any crime she may have committed. He was Miss Granger’s first friend here and I know how much she wanted to make up with him and get that friendship back.”

“And that is why he has to stay in the Gryffindor dorms.” Dumbledore told her. “He needs to work through his anger at his fellow students and the Wizarding world as a whole and he can’t do that if we allow him to hide from us. It is important that young Harry remain in the wizarding world. He is too important to lose.”

“You keep saying that Albus, but compared with the future witches and wizard of our world, why is he so important? If this keeps up it is possible that we may lose these students to other schools, if they don’t decide to give up their education completely.” She pointed out. “Tell me why he is so important.”

Dumbledore sighed and met her gaze, the twinkle for once gone from his eyes. "Part of what I am about to tell you is confidential, known only to those in the Department of Mysteries and a few senior members of the Wizengamot. Did you know that the number of new wizards and witches being born is slowly declining and that the Wizarding world is basically stagnant?"

"What are you talking about?" McGonagall knew what the word meant, but didn't see how it related to the current topic under discussion. "I know that because of the deaths caused by the last two Dark Lords that the population of the wizarding world as a whole might be down, but I had no idea the birth rate was going down."

"Inbreeding among wizards and witches has caused the birth rate of magically able children to go down." Albus told her simply. "There are more squibs being born every day."

"Surely the infusion of muggle-borns and half-bloods is able to counter that." McGonagall seemed surprised that things might be as bad as he had indicated.

"It isn't something that is obvious to the naked eye yet," Dumbledore began to explain, "but as head of the Wizengamot among other things, I can get a look at the birth statistics and I did about 40 years ago, when I started noticing, a decrease in the number of witches and wizards attending Hogwarts. I also checked with the Headmasters and headmistresses of other European schools and they were also showing small but steadily declining numbers, more than could be accounted for by the actions of Grindelwald and his followers or even now Voldemort and his followers. Even though the pure bloods will not admit it, muggle-borns and those with a mixed magical heritage far outnumber them and it is among the pure bloods that the decline is the most obvious and the children are some of the weakest magically."

After a few moments pause he continued, "Also except for a few new potions such as the Wolfsbane potion, there have been no magical advances of any kind in the last fifty years or so. It has also been noted that with each generation while our first years start out fairly powerful with the first year spells, but as they progress through their

years of school, their power seems to level out by their third year and even at the point where they would normally go through their magical maturity around fifteen or sixteen, their power level doesn't increase all that much. This seems to be the case even for muggle-borns. This trend has been studied for the last twenty years, using records going back over the last one hundred years. There is some speculation among a few members of the Department of Mysteries along with several other departments that more of our kind should be capable of wandless magic given the power levels recorded for them when they start their first year of school. It has also been noted that among the pure-blood families that refuse to even consider marrying muggle-borns or half bloods that the number of Squibs is rising steadily due to inbreeding."

"Do they have any idea what is causing this?" McGonagall was caught up in what she was hearing. She had quickly realized the implications behind the fact that each generation of witches and wizards seemed to be a little weaker than the last.

"Several factors," Dumbledore told her. "Did you know that most muggle-borns, unless they have married into wizarding families or are very clearly powerful, leave the wizarding world within a few years of graduating from Hogwarts, Beauxbatons, or Durmstrang."

"Why would they want to do that?" McGonagall hadn't been aware of this.

"Discrimination." Dumbledore told her simply. "About a hundred years ago, the Purebloods of the time realizing that the muggle-borns were growing in number and would quickly outnumber them put legislation in place limiting what occupations a muggle-born could do, because they were afraid of losing their power. They managed to lock them out of most positions of power in the Ministry, so they couldn't do anything to make changes." Dumbledore told her. "Some of those who have left the wizarding community here have immigrated to America or Australia where there is very little distinction between muggle-borns and pure-bloods, so they can exercise their full potential. Others have just returned to the muggle world and for those who can not afford it the wizarding world is forced to pay for their re-

education to the ways of the muggle world so they can find a job there.”

“And nothing has been done to try and reverse these laws?” McGonagall couldn’t believe the wizarding community could be so short-sighted.

“Every time someone has recognized what the discrimination of muggle-borns is doing to our world and tried to get legislation enacted to relax or remove those restrictions, the pure bloods step in and block it.” Dumbledore shook his head over the sheer stupidity of it. “As for what is causing the magic levels to decline among our students instead of increasing, besides inbreeding, all we have are guesses. All accidental magic is wandless and while usually driven by emotion, it is quite powerful. It might be how our students are taught, the wands themselves, or maybe a combination of both. We are forcing their ability to do wandless magic to follow a path of specific words and gestures to work and for the power they use to flow through the wands instead of flowing the way it wanted to. This probably causes their wandless magical ability to weaken from lack of use if not completely atrophy.”

“While all of this is indeed cause for concern,” McGonagall put in, “that still doesn’t explain why Mr. Potter is so important.”

“There are several reasons.” Dumbledore told her. “The first being that as the Destroyer of Voldemort, he has a lot of clout and though he doesn’t like the idea he is in a position to make changes and even have abolished those laws that prevent the muggle-borns from being able to make any real contributions in our world so they will stay. Not to mention it would be nice to see him get married and settle down with a nice young witch”

“And possibly father some magically powerful children?”

“Yes there is that.” Dumbledore agreed, as if the idea only just now occurred to him, but McGonagall wasn’t fooled.

“Any other reasons?”

“Just one other, if at some point we can convince him to become a teacher at Hogwarts, he might be able to help our first years begin to harness their wandless magic, which might lead to them getting more powerful magically when they reach magical maturity. Otherwise, according to the best guesses made by those who have been studying this and also taking into account all the powerful wizarding families that were lost during the times of Grindelwald and Voldemort, we have maybe two hundred years before the only thing being born in the wizarding world will be squibs.” Dumbledore’s expression was grim as he said this.

“So once again we need to get Mr. Potter to become the wizarding world’s salvation without telling him why.” McGonagall concluded tartly.

“I’m afraid so,” Dumbledore agreed. “If he knew that the existence of our entire race hinged on him remaining here, given his current level of anger, he would run far and fast and that would be the end of wizardkind.”

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A large sealed envelope suddenly dropping onto the table in front of him startled Harry. He looked up and saw a grey eagle owl just settling on to the table in front of him. He offered the owl some of his bacon as he carefully turned the envelope over.

The front of the envelope just had: Harry Potter written on it and the handwriting looked familiar and the envelope seemed to be stuffed full. However given that he hadn’t been expecting anything, Harry did several detection spells on it looking for hexes, traps, or any other nasty surprises. He remembered very clearly the booby-trapped letters that Granger had received during their fourth year after Skeeter’s article had come out about her and suspected the angry Gryffindors might have decided to try and do the same thing to him. Since the spells detected nothing dangerous, Harry slit the envelope open with a nearby knife and poured the contents on the table.

There were a number of cut out articles and a small note. A quick glance at the note reminded Harry of the request he’d made to Alex

after Fudge's attempt to award him the Order of Merlin a few weeks ago. He's asked him to send him copies of any articles that came out about Minister's attempt to give him that award and its fallout, since he didn't want to have to track down each story/paper personally. He'd been curious to know if any of the reporters would report what happened accurately or if they would they put their own personal spin on it. If he were to judge by the glares of his fellow students over the past few days, then some of the reporters had put their own personal spin on it, or else they didn't like hearing the truth about themselves.

He expected Rita Skeeter to run her own personal smear campaign, especially after he outed her as an animagus. He was willing to bet that she was going to find it much harder to get into places she shouldn't be, given that anti-animagi wards had probably been put up all over the Ministry and anywhere else that someone wanted to keep her out of. He wondered if she would manage to stay out of prison.

The article on top appeared to be the whole front page of the Daily Prophet and the headline on it said: Boy-Who-Lived Accuses Minister And Ministry Of Corruption! And in a smaller headline: Fudge accused of Knowing about He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named's return for over a year before announcing it to the public! Actually, Harry reflected, as he skimmed the article, I accused the whole wizarding world of being corrupt, not just the idiot Fudge. They got the second part right though.

Certain sections jumped out at him like: Boy-Who-Lived-And-Destroyed-Voldemort refused to accept the Order of Merlin from Fudge... Minister Fudge accused by Boy-Who-Lived of knowing about the Dark Lord's return since the end of the Tri-Wizard tournament.... Boy-Who-Lived accuses Minister and Ministry of sending more than one innocent person to jail by failing to use all tools at their disposal to get to the truth.

Harry noticed that none of the reporters made mention of his accusing the wizarding world itself of hypocrisy or the fact that he had told them that he would have left the wizarding world to deal with Voldemort on their own, if it hadn't been for those who couldn't defend themselves against the Dark Lord and the fact that he wanted justice for those the bastard had killed. Most of the clippings were

practically identical, though some of them contained calls for Fudge's resignation and others wanted an investigation of the Ministry justice system, given that at least four innocent people had been sent to Azkaban in the last hundred years. He doubted anything would come of it, and given the rather convenient way the wizarding world had of ignoring anything that didn't directly affect them, he was fairly sure that innocent people would continue be sent to Azkaban.

At least they won't have to worry about the Dementors now. Harry thought to himself. I wonder if they'll employ regular wizards or try to find something as bad as the Dementors to guard the island.

The only article that reported the happenings at the award ceremony accurately was the Quibbler, but even they'd glossed over Harry's intention to leave the Wizarding world at the end of the year. He guessed they couldn't conceive of any wizard wanting to live in a non-magical world. Well they were going to be in for a rude awakening.

Harry glanced at his watch and sighed, time for Transfiguration. Dumbledore had apparently decided it was time to escalate his attempts to get Harry reintegrated into the Wizarding world, because now in some of the classes they had been assigned a study partner. He'd been given Ginny Weasley as a partner. The way it had been explained in the first class was that it was to help them learn to work together without conflict before getting out in the real world.

The real world indeed! Harry grumbled as he headed to class. These fools know absolutely nothing about the real world.

He was one of the last in class, but that didn't matter to him, he still took a seat on the back row.

Ginny who had gotten a seat at a desk in one of the middle rows, glared angrily at him and gestured for him to join her. Folding his arms, and leaning back against the wall, Harry just stared back at her with an expressionless face. Ginny gestured again, but Harry remained where he was.

Slamming her book shut in a way that would have earned a glare from Hermione for her mistreatment of a book, Ginny grabbed her things and stalked to the back of the classroom.

“Since I was here first, you should have joined me.” Ginny growled in a low angry voice.

“And why would I want to do that?” Harry countered flatly.

“I’m your partner for this class, remember?” Ginny stomped her foot under the desk, making sure to bring the heel of her shoe down on Harry’s foot.

“Not by my choice,” Harry disagreed dryly.

Before Ginny could say anything further, from the front of the room, Professor McGonagall asked, “Is there something you wish to share with the class, Miss Weasley?”

Ginny looked down at the desk and said softly, “no Professor McGonagall.”

“Mr. Potter?” Professor McGonagall wanted to know.

“Do you really want me to answer that, Professor?” Harry inquired with a smirk on his face.

“Only if it concerns this class,” McGonagall told him stiffly.

“Then you have answered your own question, ma’am.” Harry didn’t bother hiding his grin.

Determined not to let him have any more control over her class, Professor McGonagall returned to the front of the classroom and began the lesson.

At the end of class, McGonagall assigned two feet of parchment due by the next class on how to make a transfiguration permanent and the reasons why the spell might fail and each partner was to do only one part of the assignment.

They were in the back of the group that was headed toward the north tower and Divination when Ginny asked. "Do you want to meet in the Library after dinner to do this assignment?"

Harry shrugged. "It doesn't matter to me. I have no intention of doing either part of the assignment."

Harry was caught by surprise when he was shoved against the wall by a redheaded shrieking banshee. "I've had it with your attitude!"

He just stared at her not saying a word and that infuriated Ginny even more. Growling, she took out her wand and pointed it at him. "You may not care about your future, but I care about mine. Since you are my partner in Transfiguration, your lack of participation affects my grade and my future. Now you will be in the Library tonight after dinner prepared to study our assignment, or I promise I will make your life a living hell."

"You've already done that, Weasley, remember?" Harry gestured and Ginny was flung against the wall her wand clattering to the ground several feet away. "You and your whole traitorous family condemned me to hell last year. What more do you think you can do? Scream? Cry? Stamp your feet like a little child when she doesn't get her way? Nothing you threaten me with can be worse than what you did to me last year. You owed me your life! I saved yours during your first year here remember? And nearly lost my own in the process when you were stupid enough to write in a cursed diary, instead of talking to your yearmates or your family about your problems of trying to fit in at Hogwarts. Were you really so stupid that you could forget that enchanted objects might just be dangerous? Then once you realised what was happening, you still didn't tell anyone. You were so embarrassed at the thought of me finding out what you'd been doing, or that Tom might tell me you had this infantile crush on me that you stole the diary back, instead of leaving it with me. If it had been left with me, we might have solved the problem before you nearly got yourself killed because of your own damn ego and refusal to get the help you needed to stop it. I could understand a muggle-born making that kind mistake since they wouldn't know that enchanted objects

might be dangerous but not someone who had lived in the wizarding world her whole life.”

Harry paused for a moment, then got back on track with what he had originally intended to say. “Even with the life debt hanging over your head, instead of trying to help me, or standing by me, you joined the rest of your kind and condemned me without even listening to me. The life debts you and your father owe me will never be repaid, because I won’t accept anything from you ever again. What happens I wonder when a life debt goes unpaid for generations? Will your whole family eventually lose its magic? I know that if your father’s debt remains unpaid it is passed on to all of his children for one of them to redeem. That’s means that you and your children, if you have any, will have two life debts unpaid, not just one. I rather imagine there will eventually be some kind of stigma, if the wizarding world doesn’t turn a blind eye to it the way they usually do to most things. Enjoy your life Weasley, may it be long and a total misery.”

From her position on the floor, Ginny stared at Harry’s back as he stalked away, not toward Divination, but in the opposite direction.

Tears began filling her eyes as she searched for her wand. She’d wanted to provoke a reaction and she’d gotten one, only it wasn’t the one she wanted. While she hadn’t pestered Harry over the last two months the way everyone else had and was still doing, Ginny had hoped that time and her quiet supportive presence would ease Harry’s anger toward her, but that hadn’t happened. Harry had treated her like she didn’t exist for the most part. At other times she had the feeling he was thinking he should have left her in the Chamber of Secrets five years ago. Well she wasn’t giving up. He might hate her now, but he was hers and no other witch was going to take him away from her. She’d already had to take steps to discourage several of the more determined and predatory witches from their pursuit of her man.

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Ginny didn’t see Harry again until dinner. He was sitting at the end of the Gryffindor table his attention fixed on the pages of the book he

was reading. She started to go over to apologise for her earlier behaviour, but Ron intercepted her.

“Ginny,” he hissed, “don’t rock the boat right now. According to what I heard from McGonagall the replacement Firebolt will be here tomorrow. We need to give it to him and get him back on the Quidditch team before that game against Slytherin next week. If you make him madder than he is right now, he’ll refuse to play and I don’t want to see us flattened like we were by them in last year’s game that was embarrassing. Not to mention the fact that Draco Malfoy was positively disgusting the way he gloated over the fact that he got the snitch before you.”

“What makes you so sure he will want to play Quidditch for Gryffindor?” Ginny asked. “I mean given that he hates our entire House right now, why would you think he would want to help us beat Slytherin?”

“He loves to fly and he loves playing Quidditch. He also hates Malfoy.” Ron reminded her. “Even if we can’t get him to play Seeker for any of the other games, I’m sure we can convince him to play in the one against Slytherin. And I’m sure that once we’ve got him back on a broom, he’ll want to continue playing and the Quidditch Cup will be ours once more.”

Ginny just shook her head at her brother’s priorities as she allowed herself to be dragged away. Hermione was right. Ron was Quidditch mad. She was certain that if he were to die tomorrow, Ron’s last thoughts probably wouldn’t be of his family, they would probably be about the Chuddeley Cannons and whether or not they would have a winning season and lamenting the fact he wouldn’t be able to see it.

As she ate her dinner, Ginny watched Harry and tried to work out what she was going to say to him so he wouldn’t freeze her out again. She would have the man she’d dreamed of having since she was a little girl and had first heard of Harry Potter. Even though she made some mistakes early on, she knew he liked her or rather he had until she had turned against him last year. He just needed to see that this time it would be different. She needed him to see that she’d regretted what had happened last year and her part in it. He had to see that

she wouldn't make the same mistakes again and that it was safe for him to trust... no love her because she would never betray him again. She would die before she did that!

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"Potter," Colin Creevy poked his head into the sixth year dorm.

"What is it Creevy?" Harry looked up from the notebook he was writing in.

"You're wanted in the Common Room by McGonagall." Collin told him before ducking back out of the doorway.

Sighing Harry put the thick book he was reading and his notebook back into his book bag and took it to the Common Room with him.

As he reached the final stairway that led to the Common Room he saw the room was full of people and level of noise from their conversations sounded like a large hive of bees. A quick check showed him that none of the first years were there only the second through seventh years were waiting there with McGonagall. What was going on now? He tensed, determined to be ready for anything. They weren't going to catch him by surprise like they had last year.

McGonagall seeing him at the top of the stairs called, "Please come down, Mr. Potter. We're all waiting for you."

Sighing, Harry headed down the stairs, wondering what Dumbledore and McGonagall had planned now.

As he was heading down the stairs, Harry saw all the Gryffindors, carefully manoeuvre around until their Head of House was closest to the foot of the stairs and Harry. He smirked at their actions So much for the bravery of Gryffindors.

"What did you want to see me about Professor?" Harry asked as soon as he reached the foot of the stairs.

"Your fellow Gryffindors would like to make a little presentation to you, Mr. Potter." McGonagall told him.

"Oh and what might that be?" Harry folded his arms across his chest, now certain that Dumbledore was trying to manipulate things again.

McGonagall stepped to one side, revealing Ginny who had been concealed behind her. Ginny was holding a broom in her hands and around the handle was tied a red and gold ribbon.

"Harry," Ginny's voice squeaked. She took a deep breath and tried again. "Harry, we your fellow Gryffindors would like to apologise for our behaviour last year and for destroying your possessions and to let you know how sorry we are for what we did. While we can not replace everything that was destroyed, we have gotten together to replace your Firebolt."

She stepped forward and held the broom out to him a slight smile on her face. Her smile faltered when Harry made no move to take it. "Harry, please take it. It is yours."

"And your place on the Quidditch team is waiting for you too!" Ron called from within the crowd behind Ginny.

Harry shook his head. "This isn't mine. The Firebolt I got as a Christmas and birthday gift from my godfather was destroyed last year. This is a guilt offering. I rather imagine that Dumbledore and McGonagall thought of it. I mean I doubt the Gryffindors wouldn't have thought of this themselves, especially given that a Firebolt is a very expensive broom."

"What does it matter who thought of it?" Ginny was beginning to get a little angry. This wasn't going at all like any of them had planned. They had all thought he would be pleased to have his broom back instead he was acting like an ungrateful git. "The point is we all paid for it so we could give it back to you."

Harry looked around the room for a moment and then at the floor before saying. "So this is for me. Mine to do with as I please."

“Yes, Harry,” Ginny said pleased that he seemed to be accepting their gift and apology. This time when she handed him the broom he took it.

“So if I were to throw it in the fire over there, no one would stop me because it’s mine.” Harry commented.

“Why would you want to do that?” Ron shouted. “You need a broom to play Seeker. You can’t fly without a broom.”

“Who said I wanted to be Seeker? Especially Seeker for this House.” Harry shot back meeting Ron’s gaze.

“Well you surely don’t want Slytherin to win the Quidditch Cup or the House Cup do you?” Ron countered.

“To tell you the truth Weasel, I could care less who wins the stupid Quidditch Cup.” Harry told the group flatly, earning gasps of surprise and outrage from the diehard Quidditch fans.

Harry removed the ribbon from the broom and then released it so it was hanging in the air. He could see near the handle tip his name had been embossed in gold with a lighting bolt beneath it. They must have told the broom company who the broom was for and probably got it at a discount since the broom company could then say they made the broom that Harry Potter Saviour of the Wizarding World flies and prefers.

With a flinging gesture of his hand, the broom flew backwards across the room toward the fireplace, causing a number of Gryffindors to have to duck to avoid being hit by it. The broom came to rest not in the fireplace as they all feared it might, but against the side of it. A moment later a shiny bronze plaque appeared beneath it.

Harry headed for the portrait hole, pushing people out of his way when they tried to prevent him from leaving.

Ginny stood there stunned for a moment and then followed him out, calling his name.

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When she returned to the Common Room about an hour later it was almost empty.

“Did you manage to catch up with him Miss Weasley?” Professor McGonagall asked.

“Almost Professor McGonagall.” Ginny told her. “I was just able to keep him in sight until he went to Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom. When I tried to follow him in there, I hit some kind of invisible wall that wouldn’t let me through right away. It took several minutes before I was able to pass it and when I got inside, Harry was gone. I think he went into the Chamber and the entrance was closed so I couldn’t follow.”

“Well I’m glad you didn’t,” was all McGonagall said before quickly heading out of the common room and to the Headmaster’s office.

Ginny went over to see what was on the plaque beneath the broom they had given to Harry.

THIS IS HERE TO SERVE AS A REMINDER TO ALL WHO DWELL WITHIN THESE CHAMBERS. YOU THINK YOU HAVE BECOME A PART OF AN ANCIENT AND NOBLE HOUSE. I WARN YOU, YOU HAVE NOT.

YOU MAY HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT NEVER HAS A GRYFFINODR GONE DARK, BUT THAT WILL MEAN THEY HAVE FORGOTTEN OR CHOOSE TO IGNORE AT LEAST TWO GRYFFINODRS WHO CHOSE TO SERVE LORD VOLDEMORT OTHERWISE KNOWN AS TOM RIDDLE. WHO ARE THESE TWO GRYFFINDORS WHO SO DISGRACED THEIR HOUSE AND HONOUR YOU MIGHT ASK? WHY THEY ARE PETER PETTIGREW AND PERCIVAL WEASLEY.

YOU WILL FIND AS YOUR YEARS OF SCHOOLING PROGRESS YOU HAVE IN FACT ENTERED INTO A HOUSE OF JACKALS NOT LIONS. YOU WILL FIND THAT THEY WILL TURN ON YOU QUITE QUICKLY IF YOU DO ANYTHING OR ACT IN ANY MANNER THEY DO NOT FEEL IS RIGHT FOR A GRYFFINDOR, SUCH AS DO

SOMETHING THAT WILL COST YOUR HOUSE POINTS, BUT YOU DO IT BECAUSE IT IS THE "RIGHT" THING TO DO IN ORDER TO HELP SOMEONE ELSE OUT. OR MAYBE YOU HAVE AN UNUSUAL GIFT THAT THEY CONSIDER "DARK" SUCH AS BEING A PARSELMOUTH. THAT WILL QUICKLY GET YOU THOUGHT OF AS EVIL AND YOU WILL BE SHUNNED, NOT ONLY BY YOUR OWN HOUSE, BUT THEY MAY SPREAD IT AROUND SO THE OTHER HOUSES KNOW FOR THEIR PROTECTION AND THEY WILL SHUN YOU AS WELL.

YOU WILL ALSO FIND THAT SOMETIMES WHEN YOU TELL THE TRUTH BECAUSE IT IS ALL YOU HAVE, YOU WILL NOT BE BELIEVED, BECAUSE IT DOESN'T FIT WITH WHAT THEY BELIEVE AND NOTHING YOU SAY OR DO WILL CHANGE THEIR MINDS.

IF EVER YOU THINK THIS PLAQUE IS WRONG ASK ANY GRYFFINDOR AND SEE IF THEY WILL TELL YOU WHAT THE MEMBERS OF THIS NOBLE HOUSE OF GRYFFINDOR DID TO HARRY POTTER DURING THE YEARS HE WENT TO SCHOOL HERE. SEE IF THEY WILL OWN UP TO OR COVER UP THE TRUTH. SEE IF YOU CAN EVEN FIND IT IN THE SCHOOL LIBRARY IF THEY WILL NOT TELL YOU. DO YOU HAVE THE COURAGE TO SEEK THE TRUTH, OR WILL YOU BE LIKE THE REST AND IGNORE THE TRUTH IN FAVOUR OF WHAT IT IS PREFERRED THAT YOU BELIEVE?

WE SHALL SEE.

My Life Is Going To The Dogs

On the Friday before the first Quidditch match of the year, Harry was called out of Potions class by one of the fifth year prefects because Professor McGonagall wanted to see him.

Harry left the class with some regret because Professor Wilmot was a huge improvement over Snape. Then again, even Fudge would have been an improvement over Snape; always assuming the idiot knew anything about Potions, which Harry doubted. Professor Wilmot was a very pleasant and knowledgeable woman who was able to maintain order, without terrorizing the students, while teaching a complex subject. She was also able to make the subject interesting to the students no matter what their skill level.

It's a pity that we didn't have Professor Wilmot or someone like her at Hogwarts for the past seven years. Harry thought to himself. It certainly would have made Potions a lot easier for Neville and I. And who knows maybe Neville would've been better at potions given his skill with herbs.

When he appeared in her office doorway, McGonagall ordered, "Come in, Mr. Potter, and close the door behind you."

Harry did as she asked. Then without waiting for an invitation he sat down in front of her desk and waited quite patiently to see why she had summoned him.

"I called you here to undo the spell you placed on Mr. Malfoy." McGonagall placed a cage holding a snow-white ferret on her desk.

"You mean the spell he cast on himself." Harry reminded her with a smile, pleased that Malfoy was still a ferret. He'd always thought the blond Slytherin made a better ferret than a person. "He cast the spell, I merely sent it back to him."

"Well whatever you did to the spell when you returned it to him, has prevented me from undoing the change." McGonagall told him crisply.

"You mean that a Transfiguration Mistress can't undo the spell that Malfoy cast?" Harry glanced at the caged ferret. "Damn Malfoy, you're good!"

The ferret chattered angrily at him.

"I'm not the one who acted without thinking, remember Malfoy?" Harry reminded the angry ferret. "You definitely aren't living up to the qualities of your House, which I believe include cunning and patience. Are you sure you weren't sorted into the wrong house? I mean you are acting more and more like a Gryffindor every day."

If it were possible for a ferret to give someone a death glare, ferret Malfoy managed it.

"Beyond returning the spell to Mr. Malfoy, did you alter it in any way?" McGonagall was fairly certain he had, but wanted to get it confirmed.

There was a pleased look on Harry's face as he contemplated the ferret. "Maybe just a little," he admitted. "Malfoy had intended the change to be permanent. I altered it to give him an out if the spell he'd cast couldn't be undone."

"What kind of out?" McGonagall asked since Malfoy couldn't.

Harry shrugged. "He simply has to admit that he was wrong and truly believe he was in the wrong for attacking me in the Great Hall, not just say it because it will undo the spell."

"Since it is doubtful that Mr. Malfoy will ever admit such a thing, can you undo his spell?" McGonagall wanted to know.

Harry looked at the ferret for a moment his gaze slightly unfocused as if he were seeing something she couldn't. "I could but I won't."

"Why?"

"Because he wouldn't learn anything if I did." Harry told her.

"And what is it he has to learn?" McGonagall inquired.

“He, in fact the whole of the wizarding world, needs to learn that actions have consequences.” Harry told her. “For years if not centuries, witches and wizards have attacked each other because of petty things or over their view of how the world should be. What you do to yourselves doesn’t matter.” Harry’s once vibrant green eyes were cold as ice as he continued. “You can totally destroy yourselves for all I care, as long as you don’t try and bring others into your fights. The problem is that you don’t care about who suffers because of your actions. The last two Dark Lords brought your squabbles out into the muggle world and nearly destroyed it. You also involved or tried to involve other magical creatures in your fights down through the years and then once the battles were over, you broke the promises you made to them or made them pay because they chose the wrong side.”

“Those were Death eaters, Mr. Potter.” McGonagall pointed out. “Most wizards are quite content to live and let live with regards to muggles and other magical creatures.”

Harry shook his head in disbelief. “Did you have Binns for History of Magic, Professor? I mean you can’t be that blind to how the wizarding world treats those they consider inferior to themselves. Personally I was amazed at what you can learn about magical history, if you don’t have to rely on a Professor who is fixated on the goblin rebellions and is so boring he could put a hyperactive child to sleep for your information. I’ve learned that up until about 1945 muggle and squib baiting was quite common among the members of the magical community and considered only a minor offence. I personally think that the only reason the Ministry has made it a crime is because of how quickly muggle science have advanced and they’ve realised just how dangerous the muggles can become if pushed into a corner. In my opinion, I think the ministries want to avoid provoking the muggle people, given that they out-number you by at least a hundred to one. Even with the change in policy though, I’ve noticed that even when a witch or wizard is caught using their magic against a muggle in a harmful way, they’re not really punished. They receive a slap on the wrist and the muggle who was attacked is obliviated so they don’t remember the crime perpetrated on them.”

He paused for a moment waiting to see if she would comment. When no comment was forthcoming he continued, "I can't help wondering what will happen if a witch or wizard attacks a muggle who can't be obliterated. Will it spell the end of the wizardkind? Will the Ministry order the defenceless muggle killed because they can't block the memory? Or will the Muggle pretend that it worked and then come back to wreak vengeance on the wizarding world because of the actions of one witch or wizard?"

At her expression of disbelief, he told her. "It is entirely possible for them to do so, you know. In the last fifty years muggles have shown they can be quite ingenious when they need to be or there is a great enough threat. I know for a fact that muggle science is working on a way to modify cells to target specific diseases like cancer and AID's, because I've invested in several of them. It wouldn't take much effort to turn that into a weapon of war, if there were a good enough reason and a non-magical person were to get a sample of magical blood. They could probably tailor a disease that would wipe out anyone with magical ability and leave those without magic completely alone and they wouldn't even have to find the places where you live to make sure you are infected by it. All they would have to do is infect a muggle-born and they are fairly easy to find, given that they go to platform 9 and 3/4's every year to go to Hogwarts."

Harry didn't bother to conceal the smirk on his face at the sight of McGonagall stunned into silence by his words. Apparently she like the rest of the wizarding world had never considered that muggles could and would find wizardkind and wipe them out if given sufficient reason.

When she remained silent, Harry asked her, "Was there anything else you wanted to discuss with me, Professor? If not then I need to get to my next class. You wouldn't want me to lose any more points for your House now would you."

McGonagall finally managed to recover her voice and said crisply. "I don't know why you are so eager to get to class. According to all your teachers, you just sit there and do nothing."

Harry shrugged. "It gives me something to do while I'm locked up in this prison of yours."

"Hogwarts is not a prison, Mr. Potter!" McGonagall snapped offended. "Hogwarts is a place of learning where students receive the very best education they need to make it in the wizarding world."

"I'm certain that the other inmates would all agree with you about this being an institute of learning but I do not. There is nothing being taught here that I need to learn, unless it is how to betray others." Harry told her coldly. "And I do have express my doubts about the quality of education received here given the teachers I have had in the last almost seven years. If those teachers are an example of the quality education students receive, it's a wonder more of them weren't killed by Moldyshorts."

"How dare you!" McGonagall's anger was clearly visible. "You have no idea what you are talking about! The Headmaster always does his best to insure that the students have the very best teachers available to teach them."

"Then let's look at these teachers shall we." Harry was unphased by her anger. "I can only speak for the past seven years of course, but in that time, this supposed exemplary learning institution only had two, count them, two competent DADA teachers; Lupin and the polyjuiced Deatheater, Crouch. The rest were a joke and shouldn't have even been allowed to teach because they all turned out to be tremendous wastes of time and space. No wonder they never lasted more than a year."

"They were the very best available." McGonagall repeated then added, "Until Professor Quirrell met up with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, he was an excellent DADA teacher. Professor Lockhart and Professor Smithering were as well."

"I can't confirm or deny Smithering's qualifications to teach given I wasn't here long enough to form an opinion on him, but given that he is no longer a teacher here, he must not have been good enough to break the curse that seems to hang over the DADA teachers." Harry countered smoothly. "And the only thing Professor Lockhart was good

at teaching the students was how to preen for the cameras... the stupid fop. He was also good at making the girls and women go gooey-eyed and gooey-brained. Personally I think that Filch would've been a better DADA teacher than Lockhart."

McGonagall said nothing remembering all too well how her fellow female teachers got all mushy at the sight of Lockhart. She had been largely immune to him, having better things to do with her time, especially once the basilisk was let loose.

"Let's move on now to what could be termed the more permanent staff that I have had for classes," Harry continued with an evil grin. "First we have a Potions Professor who for at least the last twenty years loved to terrify the students and favoured his own house so much that only heaven knows how many potential Potions Masters were destroyed by his teaching methods. I won't even mention the grudge he carried over to me because he hated my father."

"That matter has been resolved." McGonagall reminded him. "Snape is no longer teaching here and can never teach again."

"But not before the damage was done." Harry countered. "There were a number of complaints about his teaching methods, but the Headmaster never removed him."

"And you know very well why he was not removed." McGonagall retorted.

"The Headmaster could have found another kind of work for him to do that would have kept him close and a viable source of information on Moldysorts." Harry pointed out. "The Headmaster made no attempt to rein him in or force him to change his teaching methods and if he really had cared about the students he would have done so. But as you pointed out, Snape is no longer an issue, thanks to me."

He held up one finger "Let's now turn our attention to the current Care of Magical Creatures teacher. While I have nothing against Hagrid personally, I can't help wondering how many students who might have had an interest in magical creatures were frightened away, because of the creatures Hagrid chose for them to study. That

particular class is both similar and the opposite of Potions, because unless you have a love from the very beginning for large dangerous creatures, it is not a class you want to take. Hagrid is a half-giant, so there is very little that can be a threat to him. Unfortunately he is in love with large and dangerous creatures, and thinks that everyone will see them like he does as harmless puppies and kittens. Instead of starting with small, harmless, nice looking creatures, he brings in the biggest, most dangerous and sometimes the ugliest of creatures to have his students learn about. He needs to learn to gauge his classes to the students he is teaching. In other words a third or fourth year student shouldn't be expected to be able to handle a Hippogriff or a blast ended Skrewt. A sixth or seventh year might be able to, but nothing earlier. Third through fifth years should be exposed to relatively harmless animals like unicorns, then gradually work up to the more dangerous creatures. And don't even get me started on that fraud Trelawney who predicted my death every year I had her class or Binns who is so boring, that it's a wonder no students have died in his classes."

McGonagall looked slightly annoyed at him for pointing out the flaws in the school's teaching staff. "While I will admit we have some problems with a few members of the teaching staff, Hogwarts is internationally renowned for providing the very best magical education a witch or wizard needs to succeed in the magical world."

Harry snorted at this claim. "Yeah I'm sure that being able to turn a porcupine into a pin cushion is really going to help me succeed. I bet it's something I'll be doing every day. Who knows maybe someone will be elected Minister for their ability to do it."

As McGonagall bristled at the implication that her class was a waste of time, Harry continued, "I'm not stupid, I know why Dumbledore forced me to come back and it wasn't to complete my education. He thinks that with time I will forgive my former friends as well as the rest of the wizarding world for what you all did to me last year, but I told him and now I'm telling you, that isn't going to happen. Nothing I learned before I went to Azkaban will be useful once I get out of here, unless it is just how treacherous and backstabbing witches and wizards can be. I learned that lesson the hard way in my second, fourth, fifth, and sixth years. Like a fool after each occurrence, I

expected people to learn from their mistakes and not repeat them, but they didn't. Now I have no intention of allowing wizardkind to betray me again. I am just marking time and taking care of some unfinished business before the end of the year. Then once I turn eighteen, no one will be able to force me to do what I don't want to do ever again."

He left her office without waiting for permission to go.

McGonagall shook her head and wondered yet again if the Headmaster might not be too optimistic about their being able to get Harry forgive his friends and be willing to stay in the wizarding world. She knew the Headmaster was right about one thing though, there were so many problems in the wizarding world that given the current divisions would never be resolved, especially with someone like Fudge in power. However if the Daily Prophet was to be believed, Fudge was to face a vote of 'no confidence' in front of the Wizengamot before the end of the year and in interim Minister would be appointed to fill the remainder of Fudge's term which would end in 2000. She knew that Dumbledore hoped to have Harry run for the position as Minister in the next election, because it would take a wizard of great power and popularity to heal the divisions that had existed for a long time now in the magical world. In spite of the way his relatives had treated him, or perhaps because of it, McGonagall knew that Harry was one of the few who saw no difference between a wizard and any other magical creature and treated everyone equally.

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The day of the Gryffindor-Slytherin Quidditch match dawned clear and cold. Everyone agreed it would be good flying weather and nearly every one agreed this was going to be an interesting match, given that the traditional rivalry between Gryffindor and Slytherin had escalated to fever pitch.

Over the past week, the Gryffindors and Ron Weasley in particular had again been providing a source of entertainment to the other Houses, whether they'd intended to or not. Rumours had been running rampant that the Gryffindors had tried to bribe Potter into becoming their Seeker again by replacing the Firebolt they had burned up the previous year. Apparently they weren't all that

confident about their ability to win against Slytherin, even though Malfoy was not playing because he was still a ferret. Rumour also had it that Potter had turned them down flat. There were also reports that the Firebolt he had been given was currently stuck to the wall in the Gryffindor common room and that all attempts to remove it by his fellow Gryffindors had failed.

Weasley had made at least one attempt a day to try and convince Potter to play, usually in-between classes. Potter had begun wearing a badge after the first attempt that either said: I see your mouth moving, but all I hear is blah, blah, blah., or I refuse to have a battle of wits with an unarmed opponent. The sight of the badge would make Potter's former best friend go red in the face, but he was so determined that Potter was going to play that Weasley persisted in spite of it.

The question about whether or not Weasley would make a last minute attempt to convince Potter to play, even though he'd had no time to practise was answered for the Ravenclaws as Weasley followed Potter into the great Hall.

He was practically shouting, "Harry, you are a Gryffindor. I can't believe you would want the slimy Slytherins to win the Quidditch cup. It should be ours."

Harry continued to walk away from him until Ron darted forward and grabbed his arm and swung him around. "For the honour of Gryffindor, we need you to be what you were and are: A superb Seeker and the finest one Gryffindor has ever had."

Several members of the other houses moved in to surround the pair along with a few of the Gryffindors. They all wanted to see the confrontation that had been building for a week now between Potter and Weasley.

Harry jerked his arm free of the Weasel's grasp with a growl and the expression on his face was one of contempt. "I am not a Gryffindor!" Harry's voice was cold as ice. "As for being Gryffindor Seeker you don't need another one. You already have one, remember, your

psycho stalker sister was playing Seeker for Gryffindor last year and has supposedly been training to play this year as well.”

Ron was gaping at him like fish as he turned to leave, but Harry had one final parting shot to deliver. “Of course, if she plays like her brother, she won’t be that good a Quidditch player.”

Ron’s face reddened as he registered the insult to himself and his sister. To hell with making up with Potter! he thought to himself, lunging forward.

He grabbed Potter’s upper arm in a strong grip and whirled him around a second time. Once Harry was facing him again, he punched him in the nose.

Harry retaliated by punching him in the stomach and with all the force of his anger fuelling the blow Ron flew back several feet to the floor.

The group surrounding them had to back up to avoid his crashing into them.

As Ron crawled back to his feet, he heard a voice he recognised as Zabini’s say, “Five galleons on Potter.” This enraged the red head even further and he charged at his former friend, intent on taking him to the ground.

The two young men were rolling around on the floor of the Great Hall exchanging blows as McGonagall pushed through the crowd of cheering students.

When she saw who was fighting, McGonagall shouted, “Mr. Potter, Mr. Weasley, stop this at once!”

The two young men were so involved in exchanging blows and venting their anger towards one another they didn’t hear her order. Pulling out her wand, McGonagall pointed it at the combatants, “Petrificus Totalis!”

Harry and Ron instantly froze in place, fists drawn back. The crowd around them quickly dispersed, before McGonagall could turn her

attention to them. She unfroze the pair and they got to their feet. They stood silently before her, Ron looking at the floor and Harry meeting her glare with one of his own.

“Mr. Weasley!” McGonagall decided to start with the prefect. “I expect better behaviour out of a seventh year prefect and yet I find you brawling like a common street thug in the middle of the Great Hall. Why did you feel the need to get into a school yard brawl with your best friend?”

“He’s not my friend!” Ron told her hotly, still angry about the insults to his Quidditch skills and to his sister. “No true friend would insult you and another member of your family.”

“Well you’ve never been a true friend, Weasel. A true friend wouldn’t be interested in someone solely for the use that they can make out of them. The only thing about me that ever interested you was being the best friend of the Boy-Who-Lived.” Harry countered. “And you turned on me the minute you thought I was trying to take the glory without you or you thought you could gain the spotlight without me in the picture, by denouncing me as an evil, Dark wizard.”

“Enough!” McGonagall broke in before the fight could start again. “Mr. Weasley, what happened?”

“I was trying to get Potter here to agree to play Seeker today and he insulted me and Ginny.” Ron told her.

“Is that essentially correct Mr. Potter?” McGonagall was certain a lot had been left out.

“Essentially,” Harry agreed, “but he forgot to mention that I had already turned him down at least fifty or sixty times this week. I told him I had no interest in playing on a team of traitors, but he wouldn’t take ‘no’ for an answer.”

“Who threw the first punch?” McGonagall wanted to know.

Ron looked back down at the floor and said nothing as Harry told her. “The Weasel did.”

McGonagall looked very disappointed. "Twenty points each for fighting. Mr Potter, you will also be serving detention." Harry snorted at this but McGonagall continued. "And you Mr. Weasley will be turning in your Prefect badge for conduct unbecoming a prefect..."

"That's not fair!" Ron interrupted. "He started it!. Why are you punishing me?"

McGonagall glared at him. "Be grateful, I don't remove you from the Gryffindor Quidditch team as well, Mr. Weasley. I notice that you didn't deny throwing the first punch. You need to learn to control your anger, young man. Apparently seven years at Hogwarts hasn't taught you that control and it should have. Life is very rarely fair and you will occasionally encounter things or people who upset you. However you can't continue to act first and think later the way you have been these past seven years, or your chances of earning a decent livelihood will go down considerably once you leave school given that your grades are barely acceptable right now."

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The Gryffindor-Slytherin game lasted until evening and probably would have gone on longer if Ginny Weasley hadn't finally caught the snitch. It proved to be a hollow victory for the Gryffindors though because the game had ended in the first tie in Quidditch history with a score of 510 to 510. Usually catching a Snitch gave the team whose Seeker got it the victory, however the World Cup during the summer of Ron's fourth year had proven that wasn't always the case when Krum caught the Snitch but Ireland won the game. Madame Hooch had declared Gryffindor the winners because of Ginny's catching the Snitch, but Slytherins were requesting a rematch since they had been ahead by 150 points until it had been caught and no game was supposed to end in a tie. Madame Hooch had refused. Pointing out that the rules never said that a game couldn't end in a tie, just that it never had before.

Ron, instead of being pleased with Gryffindor's victory over Slytherin, had been spent the better part of the evening snarling at his sister telling her she should have held off long enough for them to get

another goal, so they would have been the clear winners. It had taken Ginny cursing him with her favourite curse, the Bat Bogey Hex to get him to shut up. While he was suffering the results of Ginny's hex, Ron spent the evening glaring at Potter, certain that if he had just co-operated, their victory would've been a clear one and not just one won by default because they gotten the Snitch. He wisely kept his thoughts to himself though not wanting to get in any more trouble with McGonagall, Hermione... or Merlin forbid his mother. He winced when he thought of what his mother's reaction would be to his no longer being a prefect.

Hermione had made it clear that she was disappointed that he had lost his Prefect's badge because of a fight over Quidditch. He would have thought she would be on his side given the fight had been with Potter but she hadn't been. She had just told him it was stupid to lose his Prefect status because of a stupid game. Even after all this time she still didn't understand that Quidditch was just as important to him as her books were to her and he realised she probably never would. Just like he would never understand her obsession with books and learning.

He found Hermione's obsessive need to know everything about anything new she encountered very unsettling, especially when she expressed her annoyance because no one else, usually meaning he and Potter, wanted to do the same. They really had very little in common and it had only been their both being friends with Potter that had brought them together in the first place. In fact he was beginning to rethink his idea of asking her to marry him once they got out of school. He cared for her, he really did, but he didn't think he could live with her for the rest of his life.

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Alexander Boet was finishing up his argument in front of the wizarding tribunal, "as you can see from the documents in front of you, gentlemen, Gareth Weyland was indeed found innocent after he was Kissed and his property confiscated. Yet no attempt was ever made by the Ministry of the time to return his family's property to his heirs as it should have been under the law even when Kerr Weyland tried to get it legally returned to himself and his sisters. The sole remaining

Weyland heir, Mr. Dantes has asked that the current Ministry honour its obligations, by arranging the return of all of his family's property"

"According to Ministry records, the only remaining member of the Weyland family was Kerr Weyland, who died without producing or naming an heir." One of the tribunal members, Mr. Barthold reminded Boet. "Therefore this person can not be the heir of the Weyland family."

"The Inheritance ritual performed by Gringotts on Mr. Dantes and is legally recognised as valid by the Wizengamot because it samples both a person's blood and magic says otherwise. It named this previously thought muggle-born wizard as the heir to the Weyland family and its property." Boet countered. "Ministry records also show that Kerr Weyland had two sisters both of whom vanished during the time of the Dark Lord Grindelwald. It was presumed that they died because of Grindelwald, but it now appears that Kerr took them out into Muggle London, probably after a bombing and left them to be found. Given the fact that Mr. Dantes has thought all this time he was a muggle-born it is reasonable to assume that at least one of the sister's was a Squib and survived to have children of her own, and it is plausible to assume that Mr. Dantes is her grandchild. Mr. Dantes simply wants his family's rightful property returned by those who have no right to it since Gareth Weyland was proven innocent. Or adequate compensation of his choosing if the property is no longer in the possession of the person or family it was given to."

"Given the amount of time that has passed, we have no way to tracked down who received what from the Weyland properties when Gareth Weyland was wrongly sentenced and his property confiscated." Another tribunal member, Mr. Lumari disagreed. "It has been over sixty years after all."

Boet shook his head and produced a sheaf of parchment from his briefcase. "I have here a list provided by the Ministry Records Department of all of the property taken from the Weyland family at the time of Gareth Weyland's conviction and who that property was given to." He scanned the list and then said in seeming surprise, "Mr Lumari, Mr. Barthold, you should not even be sitting on this tribunal due to a conflict of interest. You both knew from the initial brief I submitted that

this case was going to involve the Weyland Family estates and should have made arrangements for someone else to take your place given that at least one member of each of your families have in their possession items that were confiscated from the Weyland family when Gareth Weyland was convicted and said items were never returned. Would you have ruled against my client so that your family's dishonourable behaviour would never come to light? After all when Kerr Weyland tried to get his family's property back just after Grindelwald's defeat the Ministry of that time stalled and delayed until he was dead. It was this in all likelihood that convinced him the only way he could get justice from a corrupt Ministry was to join Voldemort. Would you have tried to do the same? Probably." Boet gave them a look of contempt. "Your families stole from children over sixty years ago. Then the Ministry, probably at their instigation treated the Weyland children like they were little better than werewolves, so what's a little corruption of your honour now when compared to what was previously done to the remaining members of this family."

The third tribunal member, Mr. Capran looked at the other two in disappointment. He told the court clerk, "Let the record for these proceedings show, that as Eldest member of the panel, I am disallowing the votes of Mr. Lumari and Mr. Barthold due to a conflict of interest that should have been reported before the hearing started. I also do not intend to allow the British magical justice system to remain a laughing stock among the rest of the wizarding community as it has because of that travesty of a trial that the Boy-Who-Lived received. Let the record show that since this matter has been pending for over sixty years, there should be no further delay in its resolution until say the current heir is dead, allowing those with no right to the items they currently hold to keep it by default, I am exercising a little used statute and casting all three votes in favour of Mr. Dantes the legally recognised heir of the Weyland family."

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A knock at the door interrupted Molly Weasley as she was preparing her husband's breakfast. When she opened the door, she was surprised to see a rather primly dressed wizard standing at the doorway to the Burrow.

“Molly Weasley nee Prewitt?” He asked before she could say anything.

“Yes,” she confirmed her identity baffled as to why he would be asking. Nearly everyone knew who she was because of her relationship with the Boy-Who-Lived.

“My name is Darryl Mastres from the Ministry.” He handed over a folded piece of parchment stamped with the seal of the Wizengamot. “This is for you.”

Molly broke the seal and read the contents and became even more confused. It was an order for her to bring the goblin made tiara that had belonged to her Great Aunt Muriel Prewitt and that had been bequeathed to her at her aunt’s death to the Ministry so that it could be turned over to its rightful owner. That made no sense though, she was the rightful owner and Ginny would be after her. Hoping for an explanation, she told the younger wizard, “I’m afraid I don’t understand. The tiara is already with its rightful owner. I inherited it from my aunt this past year and I am the last of the Prewitts.”

“I’m afraid that is not correct, Mrs. Weasley,” he told her. “That tiara is one of a list of items that was confiscated from the family of Gareth Weyland after he was convicted for the murder of then Minister Alphonse Sebastian by use of the Killing Curse among other crimes as a supposed follower of the Dark Lord Grindelwald. It is listed in Ministry records as having been given to Muriel Prewitt as compensation for his crimes against her family. However when it was proven that Mr. Weyland was innocent of the crime, no attempt was made by Muriel Prewitt to return it, even when his son Kerr made a request to the Wizengamot and the Ministry to have his family’s possessions returned.”

“You’re wrong!” Molly flared up angrily. “Great Aunt Muriel wouldn’t have done that. She was an honourable woman. The tiara belonged to her and to her mother before her!”

“If you have proof of this you will need to bring it with you by no later than 10am on December 21st.” Mastres was unphased by her angry declaration. “I should warn you that whatever proof you bring should

include at least one photo or painting of someone in your family line wearing the tiara prior to the 1880's since there is proof of Annalysse Weyland and her mother wearing it from that time forward, so any proof you provide for your claim of ownership must be from prior to that time period. Have a good day Mrs. Weasley."

Mastres apparated out before she could say another word.

As Molly returned to the kitchen the parchment decree clutched tightly in her fist, Arthur joined her there.

"Who was at the door dear?" He wanted to know.

"Darryl Mastres," Molly told him.

"From the Wizengamot's tribunal offices?" Arthur recognized the name. "What did he want?"

"To deliver this!" She thrust the parchment into his hand.

Arthur read the parchment and commented. "I didn't know your family had received any compensation from the Weyland family in the 30's."

"We didn't!" Molly growled. "The Ministry has made a mistake. The tiara was Great Aunt Muriel's and it didn't belong to any other family but mine!"

"Someone probably just made a mistake when they were writing up the original list." Arthur attempted to soothe his angry wife. "We'll get it sorted out. You'll see."

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As the morning mail arrived, four strangers entered the Great Hall. Three remained by the doors while the fourth walked up to the Head table and handed an envelope to the Headmaster. Those closest to the Head table saw the Headmaster pale slightly before getting up hurriedly and escorting the four visitors out of the Great Hall.

The silence that followed in the wake of the Headmaster's rather abrupt departure was almost deafening. It was quickly followed by the excited babble of the students trying to figure out what those four people were here for. From the expression on the Headmaster's face it probably wasn't anything good.

Dumbledore led the four who had been sent by the Wizengamot up to his office. Gesturing to the seats around his office he said somewhat distractedly, "Have a seat, gentlemen and ladies."

Once they were seated, a wizard who appeared to be almost as old as Dumbledore told the Headmaster, "My name is Adam Jessup. My colleagues and I are here to conduct the first of the periodic inspections the Wizengamot requested. We are from the American Department of Magical Education."

Dumbledore stared at him surprised "I have been expecting someone from the Ministry, since the hearing several months ago. Can you tell me, Mr. Jessup, why they chose to request assistance for this inspection from America?"

"It's quite simple, sir," Jessup told him. "The Wizengamot wanted to make sure these inspections were fair and impartial for all concerned, so they requested inspectors who didn't have an axe to grind with you, or who might choose to ignore things they see because of who you are, Professor Dumbledore."

Dumbledore nodded in understanding, but was not pleased by it. He had been hoping to get someone at least moderately sympathetic to him and who had gone to Hogwarts previously. "Very well, Mr. Jessup. How do you wish to proceed with this inspection?"

"Actually Headmaster, the Wizengamot has asked us to conduct this first inspection without any input from you or your staff. They have also given us full authority to do what needs to be done, including the right to get access to all areas of the castle we may need to go into." Jessup coughed as he handed over a sheaf of papers to the Headmaster. "This covers some of what we will be inspecting on this trip. Also you are not to tell anyone other than your Deputy Headmistress why we are here. We will also be visiting classes

randomly. Don't worry there will be no disruption of the classes. In fact neither the students or teachers will know that we are there, that should allow us to get a better idea of the teaching methods used by the individual teachers. Once the students have dismissed for the Christmas break we will be talking to the teachers individually. We do need a list of those teachers who will be leaving Hogwarts during the Christmas break, so that we can arrange to see them first."

While Dumbledore managed to control his expression, inside he was seething. He was not pleased by this turn of events. Not pleased at all. He didn't like the idea of strangers having full access to his castle and he couldn't fathom what the Wizengamot was thinking in allowing total strangers full access to Hogwarts.

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As the four strangers took up residence in Hogwarts, rumours flew fast and furious about what they were doing there. The Headmaster hadn't even introduced them or explained their purpose to the students when they joined the teachers at lunch that day and everyone agreed that was not like him.

A few days later, those with family in the Ministry had smug looks on their faces when they revealed to their friends the fact that the Wizengamot had brought in inspectors all the way from America to check out the school from top to bottom, including the teachers. Once this information had made the rounds, the only students who tried to keep up with any new information on the inspectors were those who still had a year or more to go at Hogwarts, and they couldn't help wondering why the Wizengamot had chosen to bring in someone from America to inspect Hogwarts instead of using their own people. Some, mostly Slytherins, thought despite their claims of impartiality that the inspectors were there to find something on Dumbledore so he could officially be removed as Headmaster, unlike the way Delores Umbridge had tried to remove him a few years ago.

Unfortunately, that was all they were able to learn because other than the rumours going around the school, there was no other information forthcoming from any official source. One thing was for sure though.

No one saw the inspectors except during meals and that made a lot of people nervous.

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“Miss Lovegood,” Hagrid called to the sixth year Ravenclaw as she started to leave the last Care of Magical Creatures class before the Christmas break. “Would you please wait just a minute?”

“Certainly Hagrid,” Luna smiled at the half giant. She really liked his classes. She just wished he would teach about the more uncommon creatures like the Crumple-Horned Snorkack.

When Hagrid came back out of his hut, he was carrying a wrapped present. “Would you please give this Christmas present to ‘arry for me?”

Taking the present, Luna told him, “Hagrid, you know you could’ve given this to him yourself? Harry still likes you, you know, unlike the Weasleys.”

“I’m not so sure a that meself.” Hagrid told her. “He asked me ta leave ‘im alone, so ‘m trying ta respect ‘is wishes. I just thought he might like to have that.”

“I promise I’ll give it to him today.” Luna assured him as she headed back toward the castle.

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Luna finally caught up with Harry as he was coming out of Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom. She didn’t bother asking why he’d been in there. She was fairly certain he went there because it was probably one of the few places in the school he wouldn’t be bothered, given that Myrtle wasn’t very fond of many people. She knew this because she too had spent time in Myrtle’s bathroom, just talking to the former Ravenclaw ghost, when the others in school became too much for her to deal with. “Harry, wait up please.”

Given that Luna was one of the few people Harry actually liked at Hogwarts, he did as she asked.

“I’m glad I was finally able to catch up with you.” Luna told him as she got closer. “I have something for you.”

When she handed over the wrapped present, Harry told her, “Luna, you didn’t have to do this.”

Luna waited until he had opened the present and was looking at the photos in the album before softly telling him, “I didn’t do it... Hagrid did.”

Harry looked up startled but smiling. “Hagrid?”

Luna nodded. “He wanted you to have something to remember your family by and asked me to give it to you. He didn’t think you would accept it from him.”

Harry ran his finger across the moving picture of his parents, Sirius, and Remus before admitting. “I don’t hate Hagrid. I’m just not fond of him right now.”

Luna gave him an understanding look. “You might want to at least tell him thank you for all the trouble he went to.”

Harry nodded before reaching out and giving Luna a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

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Ginny seethed as she saw Harry smile at Luna. It was the kind of smile that lit up his face and reminded Ginny of happier times when he’d smiled at her like that. As if he really cared about her.

When Luna got a hug and kiss from Harry because of the present she’d given him, Ginny saw red. How dare she! Harry is mine! Well she’s not going to get away with this! No one takes what’s mine!

Pulling her wand out, Ginny conjured a jar with a live bee in it. She knew from prior conversations that Luna was allergic to bees, though she didn't know just how allergic. Shaking the jar gently to agitate, but not kill the bee, Ginny unscrewed the lid and took it off. Using a levitation spell, she sent the angry bee over to Luna and watched as it landed on her neck.

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"See you later, Luna," Harry told her as her hand came up to slap at something on her neck.

Luna suddenly stiffened her mouth and eyes wide open then collapsed to the ground. As Luna collapsed, Harry caught a glimpse of a person with long red hair scurrying away from the area. He recognised her as Ginny Weasley. He would deal with her later something told him that if Luna was to survive, he didn't have time right now.

He summoned his staff from the dorm and it appeared in his hand instead of flying to him the way ordinary wizards would expect something summoned to appear. Though he had heard no spell spoken, he was certain that Ginny had cast some kind of spell at Luna that was slowly suffocating her. He could see that she was starting to have trouble trying to breath. He needed to buy her time and the only way to do that was to try and put her in a state that science fiction books called suspended animation. It would hold her between life and death indefinitely.

Getting back to his feet, Harry tapped the butt of his staff on the stone flagging and then pointed the glowing green capstone at Luna's body. Channelling the magic around him through his staff Harry focused on suspending all life functions and yet keeping her alive. It was a delicate balancing act and Harry was fairly certain that no other wizards could have done this. The light that came from the staff instead of being the usual green was a blinding white and came out as a ball instead of a beam of light. It engulfed Luna's body and seemed to seep slowly into her. Once the light was gone, Harry could see that to all intents Luna appeared dead, but he knew she was still

alive. Now to get her to Madame Pomfrey and then find out from Ginny just what it was she'd done to Luna.

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"Madame Pomfrey!" Harry shouted as he floated Luna's body through the doorway to the Hospital wing.

The mediwitch came out of her office looking slightly annoyed that someone would be yelling in her domain, but her expression quickly changed to one of shock when she saw the floating body. "What happened?"

"I think Ginny Weasley attacked Luna." Harry settled Luna's body on the nearest bed.

Madame Pomfrey waved her wand over Luna trying to find out what curse was used and was stunned when she got no readings back.

"It looked like she was dying," Harry told her before she could ask any questions. "She stiffened up then collapsed to the ground only I didn't see the colour of the spell being cast. Nor did I hear the spell. She started having trouble breathing almost immediately. I've got her suspended between life and death until I can find out what hex was used on her."

Madame Pomfrey looked thoughtful. "It may not have been a spell, Mr. Potter."

"What could it have been, then?"

"Miss Lovegood is allergic to bee stings." Madame Pomfrey told him as she started checking for the site of a sting. "According to her father she is deathly allergic."

"But bees aren't active in winter, especially here." Harry pointed out.

"Ordinarily you would be right, but if a hive located itself in a warm place, it could be active year round. And there it is." Madame Pomfrey found a red swollen area on the back of Luna's neck.

“Can you help her?” Harry wanted to know. He felt at least partly responsible for what had happened to Luna. He had no doubt that Ginny had attacked her because she saw her as a threat to her possession of him.

“I have a potion similar to what the muggles use to counteract it that I keep on hand for her and a few other wizards and witches who have the same problem.” Madame Pomfrey headed to her potions cupboard.

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All the doors in the Great Hall slammed shut with a loud bang startling the students, teachers, and inspectors, who were eating dinner, into silence.

Looking around expecting it to be some kind of attack, they saw Harry Potter standing near the closed entrance to the Great Hall and what scared them all was the murderous expression his face and the fact that his staff was covered from head to foot in a glowing emerald green sheath of power.

“GINEVRA MOLLY WEASLEY!” Potter’s angry voice echoed off the stones of the Great Hall. “STAND FORTH AND FACE JUDGEMENT FOR YOUR ACTIONS!”

Those sitting at the Head table tried to get up but found that they couldn’t move. Apparently Mr. Potter intended to allow no interference in what was about to happen.

When Ginny Weasley failed to appear, he said sarcastically, “so much for Gryffindor bravery.”

A spell shot from the staff, and headed toward the Gryffindor table. The Gryffindors shrieked as they tried to scramble out of the way, not knowing what would happen if that spell hit them. The yellow beam of light zigzagged around them until it found the one it had been sent for and wrapping itself around her, pulled Ginny away from the Gryffindor table and out into the middle of the aisle.

In the deathly silence that followed Ginny being pulled away from the shelter of the Gryffindor table, Harry stalked toward her and the students could hear his staff thud as it came down hard against the flagstones of the Great Hall with his every step.

“Did you or did you not attack Luna Lovegood and try to kill her?” The volume of Harry’s voice had dropped, but it was still echoing off the walls.

Ginny stood there, determined not to show her fear. She hadn’t expected him to find out that it was she who attacked Luna and even if he had she hadn’t expected this level of anger. He shouldn’t care what happened to that weird little nobody. Luna wasn’t anybody important. He should only care about what happened to her. She was after all going to be his wife. She’d had it all planned out from the day she first met him.

Several of the students gasped as a pale blue light surrounded Ginny Weasley. They also noticed that right next to Ginny the colour of the light was a deep, pulsing red.

“I’m waiting, Miss Weasel.” Harry hissed, “but my patience is not limitless. Did you attack Luna?”

Ginny opened her mouth intending to deny the accusation, but what came out was, “Yes, but I didn’t intend to kill her, just warn her off. I knew she was allergic to bees and that it would make her sick. She has no right to you. You’re mine. You’ve always been mine and you would realise it if you could see past your anger over how you were treated last year. We belong together and you know it.”

“Luna nearly died because of what you did!” Harry growled, circling her like a wolf. “You attacked your best friend because you saw me give her a kiss on the cheek and somehow in your warped little mind, you equated that to her taking me away from you! Would that be an accurate statement?”

Ginny tried to keep her mouth closed, but “yes,” came tumbling out.

“Well listen and listen well bitch because this is the last time I’m going to say this! I am not yours! I will never be yours! I want nothing to do with you! Get that through your empty head. I want you to stay the fuck away from me!” Harry was now back in front of her and the light coming from his staff was pulsing even stronger. “And if you ever attack anyone ever again under misguided notion that they are somehow taking me away from you, you won’t have to worry about living to regret it!”

Harry’s eyes glowed the same colour as the aura surrounding his staff. “I think you need a reminder of just what I can do to you if you don’t heed my warning. I’m going to make your outsides match your insides.”

Before Ginny had a chance to run, a grey light engulfed her and a moment later everything in the world was taller than she was, even the seats at the tables.

Opening her mouth to demand an explanation, she was surprised when what came out was not words but barking. Ginny looked her body over and found she was a tiny red poodle.

“Yes,” Harry told her. “You are now what you have always been, a real little bitch. I should also tell that you are in heat so you will be attracting every male dog for miles around. If you get caught by any of them, that itch of yours should get thoroughly scratched. I would suggest you start running now if you want to avoid Fang and Fluffy because they will find you.”

Harry vanished silently from the Great Hall.

As soon as he vanished the teachers found they could move and McGonagall quickly moved down the aisle to pick up Ginny before someone stepped on her.

In spite of the evidence before their eyes, everyone heard Hermione Granger say, “but you can’t apparate or disapparate inside Hogwarts.”

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“Where is he?” Molly bellowed. “Where is Potter? He had no right to attack my baby!”

Before Dumbledore could say a word a brown owl flew in his window, deposited a letter on his desk and flew back out again.

Opening it, Dumbledore began reading it silently and then realising that the Weasleys would want to know at least part of what it contained, read those sections aloud.

“By now I’m certain that the Weasleys, among others are in your office and out for my blood. Well they won’t find me. I have already left for the Christmas break. I saw no reason to ride the school train back to London and be forced to spend time with those hypocrites, so I left early to spend time with my loving family. Note the sarcasm there. Actually I’m going to oversee the only gift they will ever be giving me. As for the angry mob of Weasleys in your office, they should actually be on their knees thanking me for what I did, because I persuaded Luna’s father to let me handle Ginny instead of having her arrested for attempted murder. You see Ginny knew that Luna was allergic to bees, but she didn’t know how allergic. The sting from the single bee Ginny sent to attack her would have been enough to kill her if I hadn’t acted. Be warned though Weasleys if Ginny doesn’t learn her lesson and leave Luna alone there will be even more severe consequences. Also Mr. Weasley, Mr. Lovegood will be speaking to you in the near future about reparations for the harm done to his daughter by your psychotic daughter. I would strongly recommend that you get your daughter some psychiatric help before she really does kill someone.”

“How dare he call my baby girl psychotic?” Molly yelled. “She was okay until she met him. If she has become a little mad it’s because of him! I demand you bring him to undo what he did to my Ginny!”

“As for what I did to Ginny...” There was a moment of silence before Dumbledore continued, “it is only temporary. It will last until she returns to Hogwarts after the Christmas break. Once she sets foot or I should say paw on the same flagstone she was on when she was transformed, she will be returned to normal.”

“Two weeks!” Molly shrieked. “He’s leaving Ginny as a dog for two weeks. I want him out of here, Dumbledore! He is a threat to the other students. I want him expelled!”

“Actually,” Adam Jessup spoke up. “Mr. Potter can’t be expelled, because he is not listed on the rolls of Hogwarts as a student this year. It is only by virtue of a law enacted by the Wizengamot that he was forced to come back, but because of his expulsion during his sixth year he was not magically put back on the rolls.”

“And just who are you?” Molly glared at the man who told her she couldn’t have Harry Potter expelled.

“I am Adam Jessup, one of those sent to inspect this school by the Wizengamot and the Department of Magical Education for the British Ministry.” He told her then added. “Actually Madam, you should be more worried about your daughter’s actions, because they are going to cause her to be expelled.”

“Expelled!” Molly’s voice got louder and more piercing. “My baby was attacked by Potter and you tell me you are going to expel her!”

“No,” Jessup told her softly. “Your daughter is going to be expelled for her admitted attack on the person of Luna Lovegood. Since her wand was transformed with her, her expulsion will have to wait until she is returned to Hogwarts after the end of the Christmas Break.”

Arthur spoke up for the first time. “Dumbledore, you can’t allow this to happen! Ginny is a good girl. I’m sure it was an accident.”

“I’m afraid that he has no choice. He has been lenient far too many times in the past to Gryffindors and if he were to give your daughter preferential treatment after what she admitted to in the Great Hall in front of too many witnesses, he would be removed as Headmaster... permanently.” A woman sitting beside Mr. Jessup spoke up. “The rules governing Hogwarts and its students are quite clear. Unless the student has been attacked by another, any fatal attack, nearly fatal attack, or attack that leaves another student disabled, requires that the attacking student be expelled and compensation be provided to

the student or their family if the student doesn't survive the attack. It was put in place over four hundred years ago to keep the hexes and curses being used by the students from being fatal. The only reason there may not be Aurors at her expulsion will be if Mr Lovegood as Head of his family confirms that he agreed to let Mr. Potter resolve this matter for him except for the matter of the compensation for your daughter's attack on his only child."

"Whether he can be expelled or not, I want Potter removed from this school." Molly insisted. "He is a danger to all the students. He has shown he doesn't care about us or anyone else in the Wizarding world. He is slowly destroying my family in the process of your trying to get him to forgive us. Because of his actions, Ron is no longer a prefect and Ginny is facing expulsion. Why are you insisting on keeping him here?"

Ginny the dog barked angrily and growled the thought of not having access to the man she loved. Even though he was angry at her now, she knew there was one thing she could give him that he had wanted all his life, a family, and she would put that plan into operation once she was back in human form. All it would take is the potion she had hidden in her trunk. She had gotten Dung to buy it just in case and with the hope that she would never have to use it, but it now looked like she would have no choice, if she was to get her man.

"I'm sorry Molly, but that can't be done." Dumbledore had a look of regret on his face. "While I know it doesn't appear that way, it is for the good of the Wizarding world in the long term. Mr. Potter has to realise that he belongs here among us."

Molly crossed her arms over her chest and snorted. "I don't see that happening. It has been over four months since you began this grand plan of yours, but there are no signs of him beginning to thaw toward the wizarding world or us over what happened last year. You mark my words Dumbledore, you may be good at getting people to do what you want, but this time you are going to fail and we in the wizarding world are going to pay the price for it."

(AN: I must also thank Lady Stormrider AKA Lady Foxfire for helping me determine the right dog for Ginny to be)

A Very Merry Unbirthday To Me

The irritation Molly Weasley was feeling rose up another notch as she and her husband stepped into the meeting room at Gringotts and found there were a number of people already there. She recognized a number of them as being from Dark and borderline Dark families, including Narcissa Malfoy. She wasn't really surprised to find that they had kept things that rightfully belonged to innocent children, but she didn't belong here. She had nothing that belonged to the Weyland family. The tiara that Dantes was trying to take from her rightfully belonged to the Prewitt family. Her family would never have kept anything that didn't rightfully belong to them and she wasn't about to let anyone take away the last thing she had to remember her Great Aunt Muriel by.

She was also very annoyed that the place they were supposed to meet Mr. Dantes had been changed from the Ministry to Gringotts at the last minute. According to what Arthur had been told by Josiah Weems, the court clerk, when he asked about the change, Mr. Dantes had requested the change saying he would prefer it to be held somewhere where he would have immediate access to reliable information regarding the condition the Weyland properties were supposed to be in as well as an accurate assessment of their value. She was going to have a few choice words to say to that young man about the deliberate insult he'd given to her husband and the other honest people who worked at the Ministry, by implying that none of them could be trusted to tell the truth or do the right thing. Arthur was the most honourable man she knew.

As she tightened her grip on her squirming daughter, Molly growled, "I can't believe I have to come here and defend my right to keep my property. I intend to end this farce right now."

"Now, Molly, dear, we'll get it all sorted out." Arthur tried to calm her down as she started pushing her way through the small clusters of people gathered in the room.

The last thing they needed was for Molly to lose her temper, because if she tried to run over this Mr. Dantes like an angry troll, it would just confirm in most people's minds that her family had indeed kept items

that rightfully belonged to the Weyland children, when their father had been shown to be innocent. Having known the Prewitt family for years himself, he was certain that there had been a mix-up and that was all, even though they could find nothing in any of the records that had been saved when the Prewitt family home had been destroyed that proved Molly's claim to her Great Aunt Muriel's tiara. The Prewitts were well-known defenders of the Light and that was why they had been one of the main targets of You-Know-Who during his first assault on the wizarding world. They would no more keep something that didn't belong to them than Albus Dumbledore would break his word.

Ginny let out a yip of pain when her mother squeezed a little too hard. She had gotten a brief sniff of Harry's scent before he vanished from the Great Hall the night he turned her into a dog and her new senses were telling her that her Harry was in the room. She needed to go and find him, so she could be with him. She would show him that no matter what form she was in, she would be loyal to him from now on and that they belonged together and she would allow nothing to separate them.

"Sorry dear," her mother apologised as she absently handed Ginny to her father. "Arthur, you stay here, while I go and settle this matter once and for all."

Molly Weasley's voice was very penetrating and got the attention of those seated at the table near the front of the room, as she pushed past the court clerk who was trying to keep these proceedings orderly.

A young wizard with dark brown hair and hazel eyes who was seated at the table, met her gaze for several moments, before saying to the room at large, "And here we see a fine example of an adult Gryffindor. Impatient and certain that everything they do is just and right."

"Young man," Molly snapped, "your parents should have taught you to respect your elders."

"Madam, I do respect my elders, when they don't act like impatient five year olds who refuse to wait their turn."

Molly bristled, but before she could say anything in return, he turned his attention back to Mrs. Malfoy. "It would seem madam, that this woman is in a great hurry to return my family's property to me, so would you mind if we postponed our discussion of which Malfoy property will be taken in compensation for the Weyland estate near Avebury that your husband sold?"

While Narcissa Malfoy just wanted this whole humiliating episode over and done with, so that she could get back to trying to find a way to get the spell on her son undone, she wasn't about to miss the chance of seeing Molly Weasley, well-known advocate for doing what was right, taken down a few pegs. When she'd first heard Molly Weasley's voice she'd been very surprised. After all who would have thought that a member of a well-known Light family like the Prewitts would keep something that didn't belong to them. Wait until my friends hear about this!

Rising gracefully to her feet, Narcissa turned to give Molly a look of stunned amazement. "I don't mind waiting, though I must say that I am surprised to see you here, Molly. I mean who would've thought that a Prewitt would keep something that didn't belong to them."

Narcissa paused for a moment as if in thought and then continued, "but then again, maybe I shouldn't be all that surprised, considering the actions of some of your children."

"You are misinformed. I have nothing in my possession that belongs to anyone else. I am here today to get this mix up sorted out." Molly countered stiffly. She knew that Narcissa was referring indirectly to Percy, who had been condemned to death, though the Wizengamot had yet to decide on the method of execution, given that Harry Potter had destroyed all the Dementors.

"Mrs. Weasley, you as the Muggles would say, are wading in de Nile." The young wizard spoke up before Narcissa could make any further comments. "But since you are in such a hurry, madam, please be seated."

Once Molly was seated before the two wizards and the goblin, the dark haired young wizard was given a folder by the silver haired older

one. It took Molly a few moments to place where she had seen this silver haired wizard before. He was Alexander Boet the solicitor who worked for Potter and who had been successful in getting the legacies given to them by Sirius Black revoked.

"I thought you were working for Potter, Mr. Boet. Considering what he's been having you do, I wouldn't have thought you would have time for another client." Molly spoke curtly to the silver haired solicitor. She was still furious with Potter for turning her little girl into a dog, not to mention the possibility of her being expelled if they couldn't prove that the statements she'd made in the Great Hall were lies.

"Who I work for is none of your business, Mrs. Weasley," Boet countered just as curtly.

"Molly Weasley nee Prewitt, who my solicitor is has no bearing at all on why you are here today." The younger wizard interrupted firmly before Molly could say anything further to Alexander. "I am Liam Dantes and you are here to return a goblin made tiara that was given to my great grandmother Annalysse Weyland by her mother Malynda Carric. This tiara was given to Muriel Prewitt in reparation for my great grandfather Gareth Weyland's supposed crimes against her. Muriel Prewitt never returned the tiara to his family when it was finally learned he was actually innocent of the crimes he was accused of after he was KISSED. The fact of his innocence was widely broadcast in the wizarding world, which means that you cannot claim she didn't know given she never has lived in the muggle world. So where is my family's tiara?"

Molly found it hard not to squirm under Dantes' cold gaze. The man could give Snape lessons in 'The Stare'. Gathering her resolve, Molly told him firmly, "I dispute your claim of ownership of my family's tiara. My Great Aunt would never have kept anything that didn't belong to her."

"Do you have proof that anyone in the Prewitt family prior to Muriel Prewitt owned the tiara?" Liam was certain of what her answer would be.

“No,” Molly was annoyed that he wouldn’t take her word about Great Aunt Muriel’s character. The Prewitts had a well-earned reputation for being honest in all their dealings. “The Prewitt family home was destroyed by the Dark Lord and most of my family’s records went with it.”

“Very convenient,” Everyone in the room could hear the sarcasm in Dantes’ voice as he pulled a clipping and a piece of parchment from the folder in front of him. “Fortunately, I do have proof of my claim.”

He set a clipping containing a picture of Great Aunt Muriel when she was younger and wearing the tiara on the table in front of Molly. Then he laid a parchment document with a lot of Ministry seals on it beside the Daily Prophet article. Next he pulled a shrunken portrait from his pocket and restored it to full size. One of the Goblins waiting behind the table came forward and took hold of the frame, so that the person in the picture would be able to view the proceedings.

“Hello Grandmother Carric,” Dantes greeted the woman in the portrait warmly.

“Hello Liam, dear,” the woman responded just as warmly.

The witch in portrait, from what Molly was able to see, was dressed in wedding robes that were popular about a hundred years ago and she was wearing a tiara that looked like Great Aunt Muriel’s and she was studying the group in the room with great curiosity.

“That portrait proves nothing.” Molly refused to back down. “Great Aunt Muriel could’ve had a copy made of that one.”

“Preposterous!” Malynda Carric’s portrait snapped. “Craftmaster Abalock’s pieces were all original and as far as I know never copied.”

“That is true,” the goblin seated at the table spoke for the first time. “Craftmaster Abalock was and is highly revered among our jewellers and even now fifty years after his death, none of them want to attempt to duplicate his work because they feel they couldn’t do it justice.”

“Now madam, given the evidence I have to back up my claim that the tiara did belong to the Weyland family, you either need to produce proof that the tiara was in the hands of the Prewitt family, prior to Muriel Prewitt, or admit publicly that your Great Aunt violated her precious ethics and stole from children.” Dantes’ face was an unemotional mask, but his voice conveyed the level of contempt he felt for someone who would do that.

Molly was silent for several minutes before repeating yet again, “I have no proof other than my knowledge of my Great Aunt’s character and the Prewitt family’s reputation for honour. I know as certainly as I am seated here that Aunt Muriel would never keep anything that didn’t belong to her. Nor would my family have allowed her to do so.”

Tapping the Daily Prophet clipping and then gesturing toward his great great grandmother’s portrait, Dantes commented. “It would seem the Prewitt family’s honourable reputation is about as reliable as the Daily Prophet’s reputation for truth.”

Leaning back slightly in his chair, Dantes folded his hands in front of him and continued a smirk on his face. “Reputations are very fragile things.... Easily made.... and just as easily destroyed. Harry Potter the Boy-Who-Lived has experienced that first hand. I doubt that a year has gone by since his entry into the wizarding world, where he hasn’t either been treated as a saviour or the next Dark Lord in training, depending on the whims of the Ministry, the Prophet, or the public at large.”

“Don’t you dare compare my Aunt to that vicious boy!” Molly flared up. “He has done nothing but bring harm to my family!”

“Oh really?” Dantes drawled sarcastically. “It was my understanding that your family did far more harm to him. After all it was testimony from your son’s Percival and Ronald as well as testimony from your daughter Ginevra, that insured that he was condemned to Azkaban when he was in fact innocent”

Molly knew there was no point in denying the truth of that, since Potter’s trial had been very public, so she said, “My Aunt wasn’t a thief.”

“But she was madam,” Dantes tapped clipping of Muriel Prewitt wearing the tiara. “And I want what she took from my family back.”

Still convinced that he was wrong, Molly told him, “I don’t have it.”

Dantes’ expression became even colder as did his voice. “If that is true then you have a problem madam. There is the matter of compensation due to my family for the item from the Prewitt family line that you and your children are the sole remaining members of. If you no longer have my property and you are unable to get it back, then I am within my rights to seize any property you and they may own. And if your family's goods and chattel do not equal the value of the tiara which is currently valued at 2,500,000 galleons by the way, then I can seize you and your children as indentured servants until the balance of the debt is paid off under the old laws that are still on the books at the Ministry.”

Molly gasped unwilling to believe that this young wizard would make her family slaves over that tiara.

As if reading her thoughts, Dantes commented, “You’re probably trying to tell yourself; ‘he wouldn’t be that cruel to my children’. What was cruel madam was your Aunt’s failure to return the Weyland children’s property.”

The room around them was now silent as everyone waited to see what Molly Weasley would do.

The silence dragged on until Dantes said, “Well madam, are you going to return my property, or do I begin the process of seizing your family's assets. And since I already know that even including the business begun by Fredrick and George Weasley, you do not have enough in goods to compensate me, should I also begin the process of indenturing you and your children under the old but still active compensation laws?”

Molly said nothing for quite a while, finally realising that because she had no physical proof of her claims this uncaring wizard was going to

legally be able to steal one of the last remaining pieces of her family's history. Finally she told him, "I will need to go and get it."

"No you won't," Dantes told her. "I don't trust you, Mrs. Weasley. If you leave here, there is nothing to stop you from getting your children and leaving for good."

Molly glared at the impudent wizard. "How dare you accuse me of wanting to do something so dishonourable?"

"I am not the one who failed to obey an order from the Wizengamot to bring the tiara here today." Dantes interrupted before she could get started. "Tell your husband where it is and he can retrieve it for you. His reputation for honesty is well known, even if his judgement is sometimes poor."

Molly started to protest, but Dantes' tone was implacable "You have no choice. Since you have finally admitted you still do have my property, either send your husband to get it or go to jail. Your going to jail will have one other result it will broadcast far and wide the dishonour of the Prewitt family. I have no doubt that there are some who would thoroughly enjoy hearing about it, especially after the lies your son Ronald and you daughter Ginevra told about the Boy-Who-Lived at that travesty of a trial he had last year."

Defeated, Molly went over and spoke with Arthur for several minutes. He nodded his understanding and handed Ginny back to her mother before leaving the room.

Narcissa Malfoy had retaken the chair in front of the table and since all the other available chairs were taken, Molly had to stand there, holding her frantically squirming daughter.

"Ginny please hold still." Molly requested, "or I may accidentally drop you."

Ginny whined. How could she make her mother understand? Harry's scent was stronger here so he had to be close by. She had to find him. She needed him to change her back so they could be together the way they were meant to be. She was certain she could make him

understand that she never meant to hurt Luna, just warn her off. Harry would forgive her once he knew she'd done it out of love for him.

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It was about another hour before Arthur returned with the carved wooden box that contained the tiara.

Still furious that she had to give up a precious family heirloom, Molly stormed up to the table and slammed the box down on it just as Dantes was finishing up with a young man who had handed over a set of enchanted swords.

"There's the tiara!" Molly growled as she tightened her hold on a now wildly squirming Ginny.

Dantes took the box without comment and handed it to the goblin to have the contents verified.

"Understand this, Dantes," Molly leaned forward until she was almost in his face, "I intend to get my family heirloom back! There is proof somewhere and I will find it."

Ginny started barking at the dark haired wizard Harry! Harry, my love, I'm here for you.

"Ginny hush!" her mother admonished her.

Dantes' eyebrow rose "You named your dog after your daughter? That must get very confusing when she's at home."

You know perfectly well who I am , Harold James Potter! Ginny barked You also know what you did to me and you're going to undo it right now!

"It is the correct tiara, Mr. Dantes." The goblin spoke up before Molly could say anything further.

“As if I would try and pass off a fake.” Molly snorted as she fought to keep hold of Ginny. She didn’t know why her daughter was acting this way, but she wasn’t about to put her down so she could be trampled or kicked.

“I believe our business is concluded madam.” Dantes didn’t bother to respond to her comment.

“For now,” Molly countered, “I will be back for what is mine.”

Dantes ignored her and gestured for the Wizengamot’s clerk who was organizing these proceedings to bring up the next person.

#####

“Hey Gred,” Fred called his brother out of the back room.

“Yes, brother mine.” his twin appeared a few moments later, his arms full of inventory to refill several bins.

“Any idea who he is?” Fred pointed to the dark haired man in a set of expensive robes who was carrying a clipboard. “He’s been looking around and poking his nose into things for the last thirty minutes, but he’s not buying anything. Think he was sent by our competitors?”

After depositing the items he was carrying in their bins, George suggested. “Shall we ask him Forge?”

“Ah the direct approach, sneaky and unexpected.” Fred gave his twin an evil grin. “Let’s.”

Since they were between waves of Christmas shoppers the store was practically empty.

Once he and George had taken up positions on either side of the man, Fred commented loudly, “Gred, I wonder what nefarious business this gentleman could be up to in our shop.”

“I have no idea Forge, maybe he would care to enlighten us as to why he is here.”

“Actually,” the man commented without looking at either of them, “unless one or both of you are the other two partners in this business, then what I am doing here is none of your business.”

“Well we are the owners,” Fred told him surprised that he knew that they had a silent partner. “I’m Fred Weasley.”

“And I’m George Weasley.” His twin introduced himself. “Now what business brings you to our fine establishment?”

“I am Liam Dantes and I am debating on whether or not to buy the one-third share that Mr. Potter owns in your business.” The dark haired man told them calmly.

Fred was stunned by the news. He hadn’t thought Harry was angry enough at the wizarding world and them in particular to sell his share of the business he’d helped start, at least not without talking to them first. “And why would Harry want to sell his share of our company to a total stranger?”

The hazel-eyed man looked at him for the first time. “He told me he no longer wished to be partners with someone who believed he could kill a friend...”

“We never thought he killed Neville!” George protested.

“Well from what I was told, he never heard otherwise from you before, during or after the trial.” Dantes commented dryly. “Why was that?”

Fred and George seemed to hold a long silent conversation with their eyes, before Fred admitted slightly embarrassed, “our Mum slipped us a mickey.”

“It was enough dreamless sleep to keep us out for three days.” George put in seriously. Normally they wouldn’t have been so open with a total stranger, but this might be their only chance to get a message to Harry and get him to talk to them. They just had to convince Mr. Dantes they were telling the truth so he would tell Harry.

“Dad took it a step further.” Fred added just as serious as his twin. “He used his contacts at the Ministry to insure we couldn’t get in to see Harry before the trial and had us put on the ‘No Access’ list at Azkaban so we couldn’t get into see him afterwards. I guess he knew we would try and get in to see Harry while he was still able to think rationally. We had wanted to tell him we believed he hadn’t killed Neville.”

“When we finally did get to see him a few days after he got out of Azkaban, he was so angry at our family.” George continued the thread of the tale. “He had good reason too, most of our family had betrayed him and he thought we all had. Fred and I haven’t been back to the Burrow since Mum slipped us that mickey. We don’t consider it home any more since they were all so willing to turn against Harry that way after all he’d done for us.”

“About the only members of the Weasley clan we see any more are Bill and Charlie and that’s mostly because they stayed neutral on the subject of Harry’s guilt or innocence.” Fred added, not wanting this man to think badly of them. “We had figured on giving Harry time to cool off and then we’d tell him our side of the story. Even thought to take a magically binding oath that what we were saying was true.”

“And why would you do that?” Dantes seemed genuinely surprised and curious. “Just to keep him from selling his part of your business?”

“Because we want our brother back.” The twins said in unison.

Then Fred explained, “Our parents, Ron and Ginny may have thrown Harry to the wolves, but we didn’t. He may not be our brother by blood, but he is in every other way that matters.”

“Even if he tells you he never wants to see you again?” Dantes inquired.

The twins didn’t look pleased by that idea, but George finally told him. “If he hears us out fairly and then still wants us to leave him alone, we will.”

“Mr. Dantes, please tell him what we said.” Fred requested. “Ask him to hear us out before he sells his share to you. Please.”

“I’ll think about it.” Dantes refused to commit himself. “Good day gentlemen.”

#####

“You’re sure that demonic brat isn’t going to suddenly show up?”

It was the third day in a row that Marge had asked her brother that and he was beginning to get tired of giving her the same answer. “I’m sure. He’s spent every Christmas at that school of his since he started going there.”

Marge sniffed. “I’m sure that his kind don’t understand the significance of this holy time of year. I have no doubt they’re Godless, the lot of them. Probably Satanists.”

Marge looked calmer now. “I still don’t understand why you took him in Vernon. What if he’d corrupted Dudley with his foul and unholy ways?”

“I told you, Marge,” Vernon tried to keep his face impassive. “Some of his kind wanted to kill us. According the letter that barmy old coot Dumbledore left with him, as long as we kept him, his very presence with us would hide us from them.”

“But you put your soul in peril, Vernon.” Marge pointed out as she had a number of times before.

“Our souls weren’t in any danger,” Petunia countered stiffly. “We go to Church every Sunday. Our souls couldn’t be in safer hands than His.”

They heard the front door open and close, then instead of Dudley’s voice calling out that he was home from his night over at Piers Polkiss’ they heard an unwelcome vice call out, “Aunt Petunia, I’m home.”

At Harry's appearance in the kitchen doorway, Marge whimpered and her eyes rolled up as she fainted and hit the table with a thud.

"What are you doing here, boy?" Vernon was furious that his family's plans for a nice quiet Christmas were being disrupted this way. "I thought we were finally rid of you."

"How could I not spend at least one more Christmas with my loving family before going to seek my way in the wide wide world." Harry countered cheerfully, then he patted Vernon on the cheek. "Don't worry Vernon, you'll only have to put up with me today and tomorrow."

When it looked like Vernon was going to take a swing at the unwelcome young man, Petunia put her hand on his arm and shook her head. Remembering a little of what she had heard years ago about magically binding oaths from Lily the few times they'd talked before she'd finally rejected her sister as a freak, Petunia asked, "Do you swear on your magic that after tomorrow we will never see you again?"

Harry shrugged, "While I can't swear that you will never see me again since I won't be leaving Great Britain and it is possible given this is a small island that we could run into each other, I will swear on my magic that once I depart here tomorrow, I will never come to your home unless asked by you. Also that I will never voluntarily approach or speak with you, though if you approach or speak to me, I will respond. Will that do Aunt Petunia?"

Since she couldn't conceive of a time when she would ever want to see or speak with Lily's child again, Petunia nodded.

Harry solemnly repeated the oath she had agreed to. As he felt the oath take hold, Harry wondered if she would be grateful later for the exceptions he'd put into it or not.

"I've got some business to take care of," Harry told his Aunt and Uncle, "But I just wanted to let you know I would be back later to celebrate Christmas with you."

Vernon snorted at that. "I hope you don't expect us to buy you a last minute gift?"

Harry's face was an expressionless mask as he asked, "Why would I expect anything from you? You've made it clear all my life you would be happier if I were dead. Well, fortunately that is one thing I don't not intend to oblige you with. However if things go the way I expect, this will be the happiest Christmas I have had in a long time."

Harry vanished, leaving his relatives to ponder his final words.

#####

In London, Harry approached the office of Myra Armstaad and Associates. Alex had recommended her as a good solicitor for purely non-magical legal matters and he had found her services invaluable.

Not only had she helped him locate and purchase his new home, she had found two of the best and most discreet investigators to check into some personal matters for him. Now if everything went as planned then either tonight or tomorrow, two very explosive long overdue bombs were going to be dropped on some very deserving individuals.

"Good morning sir,' the receptionist chirped brightly as she checked the appointment schedule for today. Since it was Christmas Eve the schedule was very light and there wasn't a scheduled appointment for another two hours. "Do you have an appointment with one of our solicitors, sir?"

"No, I don't today." Jessica Moore the receptionist almost visibly melted at the velvety smooth voice that went so nicely with the handsome face and nice looking body. "My name is Liam Dantes and I'm a client of Ms. Armstaad's. I was hoping I might be able to speak to her about a matter she is handling for me before I leave for the Christmas holiday."

Briefly Jessica wondered if he would like some company, because it sounded like he was going alone. With a mental wrench, she pulled

her thoughts away from fantasies of what the man might look like naked and told him, "give me a moment sir and I'll find out for you."

After a quick call to Ms. Armstaad's office, she led him down the hall to her office. "Here you are, Mr. Dantes."

Once the door was closed, Harry dropped the glamour he was wearing and heard Myra say, "You've made another conquest."

Harry shrugged, not really worried about it.

"It's a good thing the office is closing early today." Myra continued teasing him. "I doubt I'll get any more work out of her today since she will be mooning over you."

"I was kind of surprised to even find you open today." Harry told her. "I just wanted to double-check and make sure that everything was going to go off without a hitch."

Myra understood at least a little of her client's nervousness, having heard some of the stories about the parties involved. This justice was long overdue. "Ben heard from his contacts that it will probably happen on Christmas day since they want him off-guard. As for the other matter, since they only received the converted bank records a few days ago they might show up tonight or tomorrow. They won't care if it's Christmas when it involves fraud on this scale. I still can believe they never reported any of it."

"I've never thought they were that bright, besides it fit into the image they wanted to project to the neighbourhood." Harry smiled a nasty sort of smile as he imagined the reactions of those involved. "And has the press been notified?"

"Yes, but I'm sure they will check their sources first before going out, but the local press at least should be out there." Myra assured him.

"I just hope nothing alerts them at the last minute." Harry didn't want this particular project spoiled.

“Given they’ve been getting away with it this long, they probably aren’t too worried about it.” Myra commented. “They’ll probably expect it to be fixed just like all the previous problems, not realising that they won’t involve themselves in something like this.”

Harry sighed relieved. Even though Myra had very little contact with the Wizarding world due to the fact she was a Squib, she still knew more about how things worked than he did, including how the magical government might operate in a situation like this.

“Thanks Myra,” Harry gave her a genuinely warm smile. “I hope you have a Happy Christmas.”

#####

To say that Dudley was upset about having his cousin in the house once more, even if only for a couple of days, Petunia knew was an understatement. Fortunately for her son, he had chosen to work his frustration out at the gym, the day before, otherwise her nephew might’ve done something, he wouldn’t have regretted to Dudley. He’d made it very clear over the summer that he wouldn’t tolerate any more of Dudley’s tantrums.

To make up to her lovely son for his tolerance toward Harry’s presence in their midst once more, Petunia had gone all out for this Christmas dinner. She was pleased to see that Dudley was enjoying her efforts. Clearly her nephew’s presence on this special family day hadn’t spoiled his appetite.

Marge had chosen to eat in the kitchen instead of sharing the table with them and Petunia personally thought it was the wisest decision she could’ve made. She had never said anything to Vernon about Marge’s drinking, putting up with it and her because of the remaining Dursley money that they were supposed to be getting when she died. She knew from experience that once Marge had a few drinks in her she was unable to control her mouth. Petunia also knew without a doubt that if she were foolish enough to insult the boy or his parents, he might do something worse to her than he did a few years ago and this time they might not be able to get those freaks to undo it,

especially if they were as scared of her nephew as he seemed to indicate.

Vernon on the other hand, Petunia could tell was barely restraining himself. Petunia knew that he wanted to knock Potter into the nearest wall. The only thing stopping him was the pledge her nephew had given her. She had explained to him that it was binding on the boy's magic and he would never be able to come near them again or come into their home without an invitation. Well, she reflected grimly, and the fact that Potter could turn him into a bug and step on him, crushing him to death.

"Very nice meal, Aunt Petunia," Harry complimented his aunt halfway through dinner, seemingly unconcerned by fact he was about as welcome in their home as a dog with fleas. "A pity I missed your cooking all these years."

Vernon's knife and fork hit the plate with a loud clatter and he turned to glare at the unwelcome intruder in his life. "If I'd had my way you would be missing it now."

"Now, now, Vernon, think of what your Vicar would say if he could hear you now." Harry chastised the beefy man. "It's Christmas, remember. The season of Giving."

Before Vernon could think up a suitable response, the doorbell rang. Vernon glanced at Petunia silently inquiring about the identity of the caller. Petunia shrugged. A quick glance at Dudley showed he wasn't even paying attention to the door, so the visitor wasn't for them.

The doorbell rang again and was followed quickly by a knock. Vernon turned on Harry and growled. "Friends of yours perhaps, boy?"

Harry looked at him calmly, not responding to the 'boy' taunt. "I have no friends around here. You and your misbegotten family saw to that. And those few I would call friends in the magical world," he enjoyed watching Vernon purple at the 'm' word, knowing that he couldn't do anything about it, "wouldn't come here."

The doorbell rang again followed by more strident knocking.

Stomping to the door, Vernon growled, "Probably somebody collecting for something and thinking they won't get turned away because it's Christmas."

He fully intended to show that person the error of disturbing his meal, but was brought up short by the sight of police uniforms on two constables standing in his doorway and the large police van out in front of his home.

Police Constable Danforth and his partner Police Constable Sallick recognised Vernon Dursley from the photos they had of the man. They knew from the Chief that this was a man that no charges seemed to stick too and most of them had revolved around the nephew who lived with them, usually accusations of abuse of one type or another though the accusations were quickly retracted by those who had made them, up to and including a teacher who had been summarily transferred but the school's Headmaster after her accusation had been withdrawn. The Chief had suspected he had to be high up in organised crime and it had appeared his son was going the same way until today. Earlier this week something had made the Chief's day. A pair of investigators at the request of their employer had dropped off rock solid evidence of Dudley Dursley's criminal activities. There would be no getting out of this for either him or his gang of thugs. They finally had an airtight case against one of the Dursleys.

"How may I help you, officers?" Vernon finally growled, though his tone was respectful.

Determined to do everything by the book, so there would be no procedural errors that would get the boy off later, Danforth identified himself. "I'm PC Micha Danforth and this is my partner PC Dennis Sallick. Are you Vernon Gilbert Dursley?"

"I am." Vernon confirmed then asked again. "What can I do for you officers?"

"And is this also the residence of your son Dudley Malcolm Dursley?" Sallick asked.

“Yes he lives her with his mother and I,” Vernon was beginning to get a little worried. Why would they be asking about Dudley?

“Is your son currently at home?” Sallick wanted to know.

“Why do you want to see my son?” Vernon demanded, blocking the doorway. “Has one of the neighbourhood brats accused him of bullying them again? My son would never hurt anyone younger than him. In fact he’s been known to protect them from bullies.”

“The matter we need to see your son on is police business, sir,” Danforth told Dursley. “May we see your son please?”

“Not without a warrant,” Vernon bristled annoyed that they wouldn’t believe him when he said his son hadn’t done anything wrong. “I know my rights and my son’s....”

Vernon shut up as one of the constables handed him the warrant for Dudley’s arrest.

“And now may we speak to your son?” Sallick stepped closer to the doorway, forcing Vernon to step back and allow them to enter.

Hearing sounds in the dining room, the two constables headed there. Silence fell on the room as they entered. Petunia had stopped in mid-word her one sided conversation with her son.

Spotting their quarry seated at the table, they moved until they were on either side of him. As soon as they were within reach of Dudley, the senior Constable, Danforth announced, “Dudley Malcolm Dursley, you are under arrest for extortion and assault upon a number of individuals...”

He continued listing the young man’s rights under the law as Sallick gestured for Dudley to rise. Dudley initially refused, until Sallick applied a pressure hold to the hand holding his fork that while not ultimately harmful was very painful.

“Stop! You’re hurting him!” Petunia cried trying to get between the policeman and her son. “My son never hurt anybody! You’ve got the wrong person!”

“Madam, I would suggest you back away or you could wind up being arrested as one of his accomplices.” Sallick told her as he pulled Dudley’s fat wrists behind him so they could be handcuffed together. Their regular handcuffs wouldn’t fit. He had to resort to the zip ties they used for people who couldn’t fit the cuffs. “We’ve already picked up four of his confederates. Mr. Dursley is the last and at least one of the other four has implicated your son.”

“And I tell you, you are wrong!” Petunia snapped as Marge came in to see what the commotion was all about. “My son would never hurt anyone.”

“These pictures tell a different story, madam.” Danforth showed her a few of the less offensive pictures of Dudley and his gang threatening children and young teens. “I would suggest you find your son a good solicitor.”

Marge picked up one of the pictures that Petunia had dropped on the table and looked at it. “It could be an altered photo. I know someone near home who does it for a living. Constable, you have the wrong person. I know my nephew and I will vouch for his character. He would never do this. He has no reason to. We provide him with everything he has ever wanted.”

“And maybe that’s part of his problem.” Sallick muttered softly, before saying in a louder voice. “That will be for a judge to decide, madam.”

“Mummy! I don’t want to go!” Dudley burst out crying like a child as the officers led him toward the door.

He tried to drag his heels hoping the men would give in just like his parents always had. That had an undesired result as the man who’d gotten him out of his chair applied that painful hold again and it quickly put an end to his resistance.

“Darling,” Petunia promised, “Mummy and Daddy will be there as soon as we contact Mr. Parkinson. You won’t be there long. Be brave my darling boy.”

Danforth wanted to throw up at the drivel coming out of this woman’s mouth. Her son was a grown young man, not a baby or a child. The expression on his partner’s face as they continued to drag Dudley out showed he was trying to contain his laughter at what Mrs. Dursley had said.

Harry stood off to one side taking everything in. He would be storing this event in a pensieve as soon as possible. He made mental note to find out when Dudley’s trial would be. He wanted to see it and as long as he never went near his relatives then his oath would be kept.

Vernon put down the phone. “George, said there won’t be any hearings until after Boxing Day and we won’t be able to arrange bail until then.”

“You mean our baby has to spend two whole days in jail!” Petunia looked furious. “I won’t have it Vernon! You must have some connections that can get him back home tonight!”

“They are all out of town until after the first.” Vernon told her.

“You can get him out of jail!” Petunia whirled around and looked at Harry. For the first time in her life she was glad there was a magic user in the family.

Harry pointed to himself and asked, “Me?”

“Yes, you can get my baby out of jail!” Petunia insisted. “You know he’s a gentle boy who would never hurt a soul.”

“You are deluding yourself as you always have Petunia.” Harry told her surprisingly calm. “You’re willing to make a deal with the devil right now to save Dudley, but I will not use the thing you’ve made quite clear you despise me for to get your son out of the trouble he’s made for himself, even if you got down on your knees and begged my forgiveness for all the wrongs you have done to me in my life. Your

son is a bully and has been since he was little. You both taught him by your treatment of me that it was okay to beat up on those who were smaller or weaker than he was. He and his friends used to engage in a game called 'Harry Hunting' and if they found me they would beat me to a pulp. Once I was gone to Hogwarts, he would pick on the children in the neighbourhood. You and Vernon never disciplined him when his bullying and assaults were reported to you so he learned from that was that he would never be punished for anything that he did wrong. He also learned that you would always excuse it or buy his way out of whatever trouble he'd gotten himself into."

A few of the curious neighbours who had come over to see what was going on and had congregated near the open front door had missed the first part of Harry's speech but they applauded for the last part.

"Get out of my house!" Vernon roared.

The neighbours scattered like startled birds, but they didn't go very far, just to the next door neighbour's yard.

As Vernon started to slam the door shut a pair of men in dark suits walked up to the door and asked, "Are you Vernon Dursley of Number 4 Privet Drive?"

"Yes," Vernon sighed, wondering what else could go wrong today.

"Mr. Dursley, I am Mr. Parks and this is Mr. Lyle. We are from Inland Revenue and we have some questions regarding the returns you have filed for the last seventeen years."

Seeing the curious neighbours were still near enough to overhear, he waved them inside and after closing the front door brought them into the sitting room.

"Vernon, who are these men? What do they want?" Petunia was worried more trouble might be about to visit her beloved son.

"They claim to be from Inland Revenue and want to discuss our returns for the last seventeen years." Vernon told her. While his face

didn't show it, he was worried that they might have found out about the money he'd been paid for taking in the Potter's brat. He'd never told his accountant about it preferring to use it for their trips and things for Dudley.

"Why would Inland Revenue suddenly want to talk to us?" Petunia demanded of the two men standing in her living room. "You be better off going after those who avoid trying to pay their taxes. We pay ours every year and personally I think they are way too high as it is."

"Pet," Vernon tried to hush her.

"My husband is an honest man and he pays all the taxes he owes." Petunia ignored him. "I don't work so there is no other income coming into this house to account for."

"What about the money paid to you and your husband for the care of your nephew, one Harry Potter?" Mr Lyle wanted to know.

"Me?" The young man leaning up against the wall spoke up in surprise. "They received money for taking care of me!"

"And who are you, sir?" Mr Parks asked, pulling out his notebook.

"I'm Harry James Potter." The dark-haired young man identified himself. "I'm her nephew, the one your companion was just talking about."

"I take it from your reaction that you didn't know about them being paid for your care?" Lyle spoke up quickly.

"No, sir," Harry was smiling inwardly though he kept a shocked expression on his face. "My Aunt and Uncle always dressed me in my cousin's cast-offs and I never received birthday or Christmas gifts from them. Just out of curiosity how much did they get for taking care of me?"

Mr Lyle pulled a notebook out of his briefcase and checked it. "From the age of one year old to the age of six, they received a thousand pounds a month to provide for your care. From the age of six to the

age of eleven they received three thousand pounds a month. From the age of eleven to now they received four thousand pounds a month during the summer months.”

He looked at Harry questioningly as if wanting to know why they weren't paid for his care for the rest of the year after age eleven.

Harry obligingly told him, “I went to a private school in Scotland that was paid for out of a trust left me by my parents. My parent's bank handled everything having to do with the trust, until I inherited it recently. I didn't even know about the trust fund until I started school when I was eleven. So you're telling me that the Dursleys received almost...” he did some rapid calculations in his head, “a quarter million pounds for my upkeep and they never spent a penny of it on me! They always made it sound like I was stealing their life's blood with the little they did provide me.”

Harry turned on his Aunt and Uncle. “How much of my money went to that junk you bought Dudley every year and that he promptly destroyed? How much of it was spent on those trips you never took me on? You know the ones you left me with old Mrs. Figg for!”

Neither of them answered him. There was nothing they could say that wouldn't implicate them further in front of the Inland Revenue agents

“Well, Mr. Dursley, I think this confirms the information we have and is enough to order a full audit of all your personal and business finances for the last twenty years. I would suggest you start getting all your records together Mr. Dursley. You will receive a notice about when you will need to appear in our offices in London. I would suggest bringing your accountant and possibly your solicitor.” Mr. Parks announced as he and his partner moved toward the front door.

Harry bowed slightly to his Aunt. “Lovely dinner Petunia and I very much enjoyed the show as well. A pity we won't be able to do it again.”

He made it as far as the doorway and had it open before Vernon finally lost his temper. “This is all your fault!” Vernon bellowed and grabbed Harry, swinging him around as he stepped out the door.

Whether he intended it or not, Vernon's attempt to turn Harry around knocked him to the ground.

Catching sight of the neighbours still chattering away in a nearby yard, Harry decided to stir the pot even more, especially if the press were still there. "You claim it's my fault that you decided to steal from me! Oh give me a break! You are the one who decided to steal a quarter of a million pounds that my parents left in trust to provide for my care while I lived here. You make out like I'm a penniless orphan to the neighbourhood, so they'll look down on me. You let them think I'm ungrateful for all the good things you provided for me and that I destroyed them when it's actually Dudley who destroys everything he touches!" He noticed that some of those selfsame neighbours were looking at the ground ashamed of themselves. "Tell me Uncle! What did you and your family ever provide for me, except your leavings, beatings, and hard labour from the day I turned four years old? You tell the neighbours I'm a criminal when you, Aunt Petunia, and your precious Duddikins are actually the thieves. You stole from me and you expect me to be grateful that you did! You expect me to take the blame because your crimes are now coming out into the open. Well I won't! You created this situation and now you'll have to figure your way out of it. I can tell you this, it's not going to disappear by magic."

Harry felt compelled to deliver one last parting shot. "By the way your sister is broke and up to her eyeballs in debt. I know this because I managed to acquire all her debts. Be sure to tell Marge she will be hearing from me soon and that we will be having a long talk and tell her I expect her to be sober."

Vernon stormed out the door after him and caught sight of the neighbours standing in the next yard and quickly went back inside slamming the door.

Harry looked over at the slowly growing crowd of neighbours and grinned before heading off whistling. His job here was done.

#####

The twins were just sitting down to their Christmas dinner at the Leaky Cauldron when someone in a hooded cloak approached their table.

The person within the cloak said, "I understand you wanted to speak with me."

Of Mice and Men

The five elderly wizards looked up from the chairs they were seated in along one wall in the High Council Chamber as the door opened, wanting to see who else had answered the summons for this Council hearing. They were hoping for at least the Heads of four more families from the oldest bloodlines. They needed least nine Councillors to conduct the trial that was to take place in about an hour, otherwise all they would be able to do was censure the man who had nearly brought about the destruction of the Wizarding world, and that really wouldn't be much of a punishment.

They didn't need to see the man's face to know who it was. The staff in his hand told them who this Councillor was, since there was only one wizard currently using a staff... Harry Potter.

Inclining his head slightly, the Lord Kieran rose and greeted the newcomer. "Welcome Lord Potter to the High Council of Wizarding Britain. I am Lord Kieran."

"I received three of these letters several days ago summoning me here." Harry held up three pieces of parchment looking none too pleased at being there. "Why was I summoned?"

Lord Perrivor was the one who hurried to explain, not wanting Lord Potter to bring down the wards and spells on this old chamber. They were there for a reason and would be needed later. "Lord Potter, I am Lord Perrivor. You were summoned here along with the rest of us to sit in judgement on a case of High Treason against the people of Wizarding Britain. Those letters are sent out magically to the heads of those Houses when a Councillor feels that a case coming before the Wizengamot needs to be handled by the High Council instead. We are the highest level of law in magical Britain."

"I'm surprised Fudge didn't try and get my hearings held before you then." Harry muttered.

"He wouldn't have known about the High Council." Lord Altren joined in the conversation, as the other two Lords led Lord Potter to the chair that had appeared when he entered the room. "I am Lord Altren

by the way. The Council hasn't needed to sit in judgement on a case in over two hundred years. The only ones who know about the High Council these days are the Heads of Houses that can trace their lineage back at least one thousand years and their heirs, for those are the First Families to bring magic to the Isle of Britannia and maybe a few of the older wizards who were told about the Council by their parents. After Merlin left us, the High Council held all the power and authority, including the making of laws and dispensing of judgements. Around the time of the Muggle Queen Elizabeth I when the Muggle government started changing and our ancestors were finalising the arrangements to separate the magical and muggle worlds, the High Council at that time decided to start giving more authority to the younger families and created the Ministry and the Wizengamot. They did however retain their rights and they can be exercised to take back that authority if needed. The only reason we haven't is there are too few of us to govern adequately."

"Not to mention the chaos that would erupt if a previously forgotten group of people tried to take power away from the Ministry." Harry put in. "You would've been labelled Dark Lords."

"Exactly!" The ancient wizard was pleased at how quickly the younger Lord had grasped the situation. "My name is Lord Longrim. You said you received three letters... May I ask to whom they were addressed?"

Harry looked down and read the names off. "The first was addressed to the Head of the House of Potter. The second was addressed to the Head of the House of Black. And the last was addressed to the Head of the House of Magwren."

The five lords looked pleased. They only needed one more for a quorum.

Lord Perrivior asked very formally, because they couldn't coerce his co-operation here. "Lord and Head of the Houses of Potter, Black, and Magwren, we your brethren of the First Families ask if you will join us in rendering judgement in a matter of High Treason against Cornelius Oswald Fudge?"

Harry smiled and it wasn't a pleasant smile. "I thought Fudge had already been removed from office."

"I was part of the Wizengamot hearing a week ago that was to possibly remove him from office, but when I saw the list of charges, I realised that Fudge's actions had endangered us all." Lord Perrivor told him. "I called for a recess and went to my office to use the spell that summoned the Council to hear the case. Once it was activated, the spell took control over the case away from the Wizengamot."

"I'll bet Fudge wasn't too happy about that." Harry commented. "I think he owns most of them and of those he doesn't control others, that he does control, do."

"That was part of the reason, I did it." Perrivor admitted. "I've managed to stay free of such entanglements since I took my seat about forty years ago, but I didn't want that fool to get off with just the loss of his position as Minister. Will you join us, Lord Potter?"

"Before I decide whether or not to take my place on this Council, I have one more question to ask." Harry told them his expression serious.

"And that is?" Lord Keiran was curious.

"Will Dumbledore be sitting on this Council as well?" Harry's expression was grave.

Well aware of Lord Potter's dislike of Albus Dumbledore, even though the man was considered one of the greatest wizards of all time, Lord Kieran carefully answered, "While Albus Dumbledore will indeed be at this hearing, he does not have a seat on the Council. His family is not one of the First Families. He will only be here as a witness and he will have no power over any of these proceedings."

The Councillors waited in silence for the Boy-Who-Lived to decide what he was going to do. They were well aware from the Daily Prophet articles, among others, of the young man's anger toward the people of Wizarding Britain and those in authority in particular. They

just hoped that he wouldn't let that anger keep him from doing the right thing by doing his duty in this matter.

"Yes, I will take my place on the Council and render whatever judgement is needed." As Harry said those words, he felt calm and no longer angry as if his emotions had been set at a distance. He also noticed that his robes had turned to black silk edged in silver with the badges of the three houses he had been linked to showing in white and silver. Instantly suspicious, Harry demanded to know "What just happened to me?"

Well aware of the spells that were placed on Councillors once they agreed to sit in judgement Longrim had a good idea of what he was talking about. Lord Potter was no doubt suspecting some treachery had just been perpetrated on him. His great-grandfather's journal had detailed the spells on the High Council chamber so they wouldn't be forgotten. "Do not worry Lord Potter you are merely feeling one of the spells that have been placed on this room taking hold. None of the spells in this room will compel you to do anything you do not want to do. My great-grandfather called this particular spell Cerridwen's Guidance, since it allows you to render a fair judgement without your emotions getting in the way."

"What other spells are on the room?" Harry asked curious.

"There is a truthfulness spell that compels witnesses to tell the full truth without the addition of things they suppose or don't know but only heard from someone else." Longrim listed off the spells. "Spells to keep the accused and any witnesses from attacking each other or the Councillors and spells that insure all present can be understood by the others, since at the time this room was originally built, people still spoke different languages. There is also a spell on the room that will provide us with whatever is needed like food, private facilities for rest or other needs if the hearing runs longer than a few hours. The room will also provide evidence from other places, if necessary, since once all necessary parties have arrived the most important spell insures that no one can leave until the hearing is over."

"Oh, it acts like the Room of Requirement at Hogwarts." Harry decided.

“Room of Requirement?” Lord Altren had never heard of such a room during his time at Hogwarts.

Harry had just finished explaining how the Room of Requirement at Hogwarts worked when the door he had come through opened again. This time a slender man with dark brown hair entered the room.

“Hello, my name is Liam Dantes,” the man introduced himself when he was close enough not to have to shout. “Can one of you tell me why I received two summons to come here today?”

“I will be more than happy to explain, if you will answer one question for me first.” Lord Perrivior told him.

When Dantes nodded, he asked, “What were the names on the letters asking you to come today?”

“One was for the House of Weyland and the other for the House of Ravenclaw.”

All the Lords except for Potter rose to their feet stunned. One to the heirs to the Founders had been found! It had been thought for the longest time that between Grindelwald and Voldemort all the remaining heirs to the Founders of Hogwarts had been killed. Somehow it was very appropriate that one of the Founder’s lines was going to sit in judgement on Minister Fudge, since some of his crimes had been against the school.

After Perrivior had explained the purpose of the summons and Dantes had agreed to sit in judgement, the configuration of the room changed. A curved table with seven high backed chairs each bearing the badges of the Houses the Lords represented appeared at one end of the room. The table had parchment and quills and a number of other things necessary for one of the tribunal judges to make notes and keep a trial on course. Three slightly smaller tables also appeared a few feet in front of it. Two with a pair of chairs each were set at a slight angle so they would be able to see each other and the table the seven Lords would sit at. The third was situated halfway between the curved table and the two smaller tables. On it there were three piles

of parchment and quills. Behind the smaller tables about two dozen chairs appeared. Harry guessed they were for the witnesses who were to be called.

The Councillors took their places at the curved table and Lord Altren requested, "Lord Ravenclaw, since you represent the Oldest House here, you are by Law the Head Councillor, so would you please say 'We are ready to begin'? That will summon the remaining participants."

"We are ready to begin." Dantes announced in a clear, calm voice.

Harry watched in amazement as the three quills rose and were each poised over a piece of parchment.

"That's a recording table. The High Council, Defender, and Protector will each receive a copy of the hearing, in case there are questions during or after the trial." Perrivor told him seeing Potter's amazed expression. "It's the only one in magical Britain. When the High Council was also a lawgiving body, sometimes the debates over proposed laws would go so fast and furious that the scribes couldn't keep up and this table was created as a result of that. It also had the advantage of allowing secret debates to remain just that... secret."

"I can see where that would be a good thing in some instances." Dantes commented.

A door appeared in the rear wall and the first person through it was a tall, slender, distinguished-looking wizard and he was followed by a slightly younger wizard, who looked as if he was still trying to outgrow that all elbows and knees phase of his life.

"That is Alesandre Delacour." Lord Perrivor identified the man to the other members of the council. "I was very surprised when he showed up in my office a few days ago to accept the position as Protector for this hearing. I had expected the magic that governs these proceedings would select Madame Bones the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement to be the Protector for the wizarding world. She has an excellent record of remaining impartial and is interested in getting to the truth."

“Delacour,” Harry looked thoughtful. “Is he by any chance related to Fleur and Gabrielle Delacour?”

“He is their Uncle, I believe.” Lord Altren replied.

“Greetings my Lords,” Alesandre Delacour looked up at the table where the High Council members were seated and spotted a potential problem. He double-checked his list of witnesses just to be sure. “My Lords we seem to have a bit of a dilemma.”

“What is it?” Dantes asked since he had been told he was to be the Head of the Council for this hearing.

“Lord Potter is going to have to excuse himself from his seat on the Council.” Delacour told them. “He is on my list of primary witnesses for this hearing.”

Harry raised a single eyebrow in surprise. “I’m sorry Mr. Delacour, but did you say I am a witness?”

“That is correct, Lord Potter.” Delacour replied. “Did you not receive the notice we sent to all witnesses?”

“No, I’m afraid I did not.” Harry sighed.

“I think I know why you didn’t receive your witness notification, Lord Potter.” Longrim spoke up. “Given you had already been summoned to render judgement that took precedence over being a witness, given that at least a two-thirds majority of councillors are needed to even begin a trial for high treason.”

Harry looked back and forth between the older members of the council and Delacour. “If I must step aside, then how will we have enough to make the required number for the Council to sit in judgement? Or is it possible for me to choose not to be a witness and remain on the Council?”

“It is possible for you to decline, since you are also a member of the Council,” Delacour responded after looking over a section of the

procedures that governed these types of hearings that had been handed to him by his assistant, “but the case against Cornelius Fudge would be stronger if there were two main witnesses... you... and Albus Dumbledore.”

The older members of the Council conferred for a few moments before Perrivor told him, “While it hasn’t been done in some time, even on the Wizengamot, you can choose to appoint a proxy to cast the three votes you hold. As for who would be your Proxy, you simply choose one of the other members of the Council and they will cast your votes for this issue only.”

Harry sat there in thoughtful silence for several minutes then said, “Very well, given I do not wish Fudge to be able to wriggle out of this, I yield my votes to Lord Weyland.”

As soon as Harry said those words his robes returned to the state they had been in when he entered the room.

Getting up from the curved table, he took one of the chairs in the first row behind the Protector’s table.

As soon as he was seated the door opened again and this time two people came in. Harry recognized them as Madame Bones and Fudge. He couldn’t believe that Fudge had chosen to wear that horrid lime green robe. The man clearly had no sense of taste. As Fudge passed by him, Harry couldn’t resist humming a funeral dirge out loud.

Fudge stopped intending to berate the person who would dare treat him like the condemned, but the words never left his mouth as he realised it was Harry Potter. Potter just smiled at him, but it wasn’t a friendly smile, In fact Fudge felt like he’d just been put on someone’s dinner menu. Fudge felt relieved when the boy’s attention turned to Madame Bones.

“Nice to see you, Madame Bones.” Harry greeted her pleasantly. “Were you assigned prisoner escort detail? If so I must say you seem to have come down in the world from the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement since last I saw you.”

Amelia smiled enjoying the look of discomfort on Fudge's face as Lord Potter called him the prisoner. "No actually, I received notice I was to be his Defender at this hearing."

"Ouch, that's even worse than doing prisoner escort duty. No offence intended Madame Bones, but unless you have a really big surprise waiting to be sprung, then the defendant should get ready to lose everything... especially if I have anything to say about it." Harry told her.

"How could you possibly have anything to do with it?" Fudge bristled, annoyed that the brat wasn't showing him the proper respect he was due. He was still Minister by Merlin and deserved to be treated with respect.

Harry's smile became even more menacing as he told the petty bureaucrat, "I'm one of the chief witnesses against you. And if you weren't told before the charge is High Treason against the magical world." Harry just loved the horrified expression on Fudge's face at that bombshell.

Harry glanced at Madame Bones and saw the smirk on her face. "I take it he didn't know the real charges?"

"I didn't want him trying to make a break for it." Amelia told him. "I told him the hearing was about his being removed as Minister, which was true, I just didn't mention the rest of the charges. If he'd known he was to be charged with High Treason, he would've disappeared so fast his clothes would've been left behind."

Fudge seemed to be hyperventilating and then there was a sudden pop and he was no longer beside Madame Bones. There was a second popping sound at the far end of the room near the door. Fudge tried pulling the door open, but it wouldn't budge. He vanished with a pop but reappeared a moment later in a different corner of the room. A third popping sound was heard and he appeared back in the original corner.

Grinning. Harry pointed his staff at Fudge and a bolt of blue light shot from the stone at the tip, hitting Fudge as he disappeared again.

When he reappeared, he had a tail, furry ears that would've looked at home on a mouse or rat, a long twitchy nose, and a pair of huge buckteeth protruding from his mouth.

"It's like watching a mouse try and get away from a cat isn't it?" Harry commented to Amelia as she watched Fudge pop from one corner to another, unaware of how ridiculous he looked.

"Fudge!" Dantes finally shouted, after Fudge's tenth attempt to leave the room. "Stop right where you are! You can't get out of this room. It is useless to continue trying. You will face long overdue justice for your actions if you are found guilty. Now act like a man instead of a mouse."

Fudge reluctantly took the seat at the other table. Madame Bones joined him a few moments later.

"Lord Potter, would you please undo the spell you placed on Mr. Fudge?" Dantes requested.

"Do I have to?" Harry whined like a little boy. "He makes such a cute mouseman."

"Yes." Dantes was firm, though there was grin on his face.

Looking disappointed, Harry pointed his staff at Fudge's back and another bolt of light shot from it. This time it was yellow and once it hit the Minister the mouse features returned to normal human ones.

The door at the rear of the room opened again and this time a stream of people came through. Harry recognised some of them, but not all of them. The Weasleys were there including Ginny the dog having come in right behind Dumbledore. Surprisingly Snape and Umbridge were there as well, though they were both under guard by a pair of Aurors each. Harry guessed that they were all witnesses since this didn't seem like a trial where you would want a visitor's gallery to witness it.

Ignoring the Weasleys, which was easy to do since they hadn't seen him yet, Harry studied Snape and Umbridge. It was an interesting

study in contrasts. Snape was still wearing the robes he had been arrested in and they were beginning to look a little worn, but he still looked as arrogant as ever. Harry was willing to bet his tongue was still as sharp as ever too. Umbridge on the other hand standing there, looking like someone had just killed her kitten. Harry doubted she was even aware of her surroundings, since she was staring at the ground and not really responding to anything. Harry couldn't help wondering if she were trying to pretend she was insane so she could get moved to St. Mungos Psychiatric ward. The two prisoners were led to chairs that had appeared on the far side of the room near the Defence table.

As Umbridge passed the Defence table, she reacted to Fudge and Amelia's presence with a squeal of glee, like a teenager who had just seen her favourite rock star. "Minister! I knew you would make them see they were wrong to send me to Azkaban! I'm finally going to be exonerated and freed! I knew that you believed in what we were doing!"

Fudge looked as if he were going to be ill as Umbridge gushed about how she was glad to be getting back to work as his assistant and that she would help him set things right the way they were supposed to be.

"Madam!" Dantes' voice cut through her mindless chatter like a knife. "Please cease your caterwauling. I'm afraid you are mistaken as to the reason you are here. You see the Minister is the one on trial here. If you received anything remotely like a fair trial then I am sure you deserve to be in Azkaban for whatever crime you committed."

Umbridge stared at the young man seated at the table as if she couldn't believe he'd had the audacity to say that. Drawing herself up, Umbridge said, "How dare you suggest that the Minister should be on trial? Who do you think you are? It is quite clear to me that you are a nothing. ... A nobody. If you were someone of importance then you know about all the good the Minister has done for the magical world."

"Actually madam that is where you are wrong." Dantes smiled, but it wasn't a pleasant smile. "Based on my family's lineage, I am one of the most important people you will ever meet."

Trying to avoid a situation, Fudge begged his former assistant. "Delores, please sit down. We have to let them have their moment, but I am certain I will be vindicated."

Umbridge stared at the unknown young man and sniffed loudly, before doing as she was asked.

"Could everyone please take their seats we are ready to begin?" Lord Altren requested.

Longrim picked up the sheaf of parchment and prepared to read out the list of charges against Minister Fudge, when a woman's voice demanded shrilly. "Harry James Potter, you get over here right now and change my daughter back!"

"Ah Mrs. Weasley, once again you are making demands." Dantes identified the speaker. "And why do you feel compelled to interrupt these proceedings?"

"I demand that this august body force Potter to restore my daughter Ginny to her original form and to do it this instant." Molly ignored his question.

"And what pray tell does you're your daughter's transformation have to do with the business before this Council?" Altren asked the question in a tone that made it clear he expected an answer.

"It has nothing to do with this Council," Molly admitted, "but he shouldn't be allowed to get away with transforming her into a dog. He should be forced to change her back and right this minute."

"And why did you bring your daughter the dog to this hearing?" Lord Kieran wanted to know.

"My daughter's presence was ordered at this hearing as a witness to the events the night He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named returned." Molly told the panel.

"Moldyshorts has been dead six months and they still can't say his name." Harry commented loudly to the ceiling.

"Is there a Ginny Weasley on the witness list, Delacour?" Lord Perrivior asked.

"Yes, my lord," Delacour confirmed. "Though according to the documentation I have she is just one of the witnesses for the same event."

"Lord Potter, why did you change Miss Weasley into dog?" Lord Altren wanted to know.

"Punishment." Harry told the council flatly. "Miss Weasley attacked fellow student Luna Lovegood and nearly killed her. There was no reason for the unprovoked attack other than the warped idea she had that I belonged to her. I had told the female Weasel repeatedly that I wouldn't have anything to do with her, even if she were the last female of any species on this earth."

Harry paused in his explanation for a moment and smiled, though it wasn't a pleasant smile. "And if you are planning on ordering me to reverse the spell, I'm afraid that would be impossible, even for me. I purposely cast it so that it could only be undone in a specific place and at a specific time. Any attempt to try and undo it before then will not be successful and might do more harm than good."

"What time and place?" Dantes asked.

"The Great Hall at Hogwarts two days from now." Harry informed the room at large. "If she stands on the same stone she was transformed on at the same time she was transformed, she will be returned to what passes as normal for her."

"And if she isn't standing on that exact spot at the right time?" Dumbledore was beginning to get worried.

"Then she will remain a dog forever." Harry said simply.

"Harry!" Dumbledore protested. "It is wrong to apply a permanent transfiguration to someone without their consent."

“It was wrong of the littlest Weasel to attack Luna for no reason other than her warped idea that she was some how a threat.” Harry countered. “If she had waited until I was out of sight to attack, Luna would’ve died. Very few people go near Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom and even if they had found her, they wouldn’t have been able to get her to Madame Pomfrey in time. According to Madame Pomfrey, Luna is so allergic to bees that if she doesn’t receive treatment within fifteen minutes, she will die. She should be happy all she’s had to be is a dog for a few weeks. She could’ve been on trial for murder, only she really would’ve been guilty... unlike me.”

“Gentlemen, I think we are getting off topic here.” Lord Kieran interrupted the pair before they could get started. “We need to determine if Miss Weasley can give testimony or not.”

Both men went silent, though Harry looked slightly annoyed that he’d been interrupted.

After a quick conference with the other five seated at the tribunal table, Lord Kieran wanted to know. “Protector Delacour is it possible for the questions asked to Miss Weasley to be phrased as yes or no questions? Or would all witnesses be required to give detailed answers.”

Delacour looked thoughtful. “If she is the last one called for the incident she witnessed. We can ask her questions that will simply confirm or deny what the others reported.”

There was another whispered conference at the main table before Dantes as the tribunal head looked at the small red poodle in Mrs. Weasley’s arms, “Miss Weasley, you will be called last for the incident you are to give testimony on. Your answers will be one bark for yes and two for no. Do you understand?”

There was a growl followed by a short bark signifying ‘yes’.

Handing Ginny off to her father, Molly stormed up the table where the tribunal judges were seated. “My Lords, I can’t believe you aren’t going to force Potter to change my daughter back! I can’t believe that you would be that cruel to her!”

“Madam,” Dantes spoke up before any of the others could. “Your daughter according to Lord Potter attacked and nearly killed another student simply because she thought she was taking away her man. I think a few weeks as a bitch is a relatively minor inconvenience when she could’ve been in Azkaban for the crime of murder.”

“My daughter is not a bitch!” Molly sputtered, not understanding the reference.

“Oh has she taken a sex change potion then?” Harry couldn’t resist saying.

“Lord Potter please,” Dantes requested, not wanting the flames fanned any higher. “Mrs. Weasley, Lord Potter also made it clear that any attempt to undo the spell before the appointed time and in the appointed place could cause your daughter harm. Is that what you really want?”

“He was lying.” Molly said with certainty. “He hates my family because we made a mistake over a year ago and he is unwilling to forgive us for it.”

“He is not lying, madam.” Lord Kieran told her. “He has already taken his oath since he was originally supposed to be one of the High Lords making a ruling in this case, but since he is a primary witness he had to relinquish that role. But his agreeing to be here, allowed the magic within these chambers to place a truth spell on him. The same spell that will be placed on everyone within this room once the hearing starts. He can not lie if asked a question by either Protector, Defender, or one of the High Lords of the Court.”

“He might’ve found a way around it.” Molly insisted. “He’s a very devious person. He’s a parselmouth by Merlin’s beard. It is well-known that they can’t be trusted.”

“And you wonder why I can’t forgive you.” Harry commented dryly. “Next you’ll have me as Moldyshort’s replacement.”

“Madam, our judgement has been rendered on this matter.” Dante told Molly Weasley firmly. “Take your seat now or be bound and gagged in your chair until the time comes for your testimony.”

Molly glared at the youngest Lord on the High Council, clearly wanting to say more and from the expression on Dantes’ face he was waiting for her to do so almost gleefully so he could carry out his threat.

“Molly,” Arthur finally called, “Take a seat. We know that Ginny will be returned to normal in two days and we can wait that long.”

Molly glared at Dantes and then Potter one more time, before joining her husband.

Lord Kieran rose to his feet. “We are here today to sit in judgement on a case of High Treason against the people of magical Britain and by extension the rest of the magical and non-magical worlds. These charges are being brought against the person of Cornelius Oswald Fudge, the current Minister for Magic of Great Britain. Are all assembled from the Accused to the Witnesses for both sides?”

Delacour checked his list and after a few moments, announced, “They are my Lords.”

Madame Bones rose to her feet after checking her list also and confirmed, “They are my Lords.”

“Then let this room be sealed until these proceedings are concluded so that none may enter or leave.” Kieran uttered the required phrase solemnly.

A deep blue glow covered the walls of the room and doors.

“You can’t do that!” Ron spat getting to his feet. “We have the right to leave whenever we want to. We are not prisoners here.”

“He is right you know.” Hermione put in getting to her feet and standing beside Ron. “Even in the Wizarding World keeping someone captive is called kidnapping.”

"Are you saying, young sir and miss that you do not wish to do your civic duty and give testimony in a case where you have been called as a witness?" Lord Altren asked. There was a warning note in his voice.

"No, we're not saying that at all" Hermione protested, "but there is no reason to hold us captive."

"It's so sad to see how poorly the young are being taught about the history of their world." Altren shook his head. "The traditions and history that made our people great once upon a time are being forgotten or ignored, but I supposed that's only to be expected when the only thing a magical history teacher will teach is about the Goblin Rebellions. Young lady there are many laws and traditions that can be traced back to the when the magical world was founded. A number of those laws concerned how cases of crimes against the magical world were conducted. This sealing is done for your protection. In the past, it was not unknown for a witness who left the chamber to be killed before their testimony could be given, thereby altering the outcome of the trial."

"However if you two do not wish to participate in this hearing, then you may leave, but understand it will be noted in the file kept on you at the Ministry that you refused to do your duty when called upon to do so" Lord Perrivor put in. "And such a refusal could affect your future prospects for employment... among other things."

Hermione looked horrified at the thought, while Ron looked mutinous, but they both sat back down and didn't say another word.

Lord Perrivor looked over the occupants of the room. "Does anyone else among the witnesses wish to depart?"

None of the others spoke up or stood up.

Speaking with great solemnity, Perrivor said, "All who are to give witness shall now be bound to tell the truth. There will be no evasions or half truths."

A white glow surrounded all seated at and behind the Protector and Defender's tables.

Lord Longrim as the oldest member of the Council got to his feet and read the list of charges. "Cornelius Oswald Fudge, you are here before us facing the charge of High Treason against peoples of magical Britain and the magical world. The allegations making up the primary charge are: It is alleged that you did take bribes from known Deatheaters and allowed them into positions of power within the government so that they could further their racist agenda. That you abused the power of your office in the following ways: Imprisoning the man Ruebus Hagrid in Azkaban without a trial and no proof that he was the guilty party involved in reopening the Chamber of Secrets and that through you, the Ministry has failed to this day to compensate Hagrid for that false imprisonment. That you failed to give a new trial to Sirius Orion Black when possible evidence came to light that he might be innocent or even delay his execution until that evidence could be examined as is required by law. That you did abuse your position on the Wizengamot to have a simple charge of underaged magic heard before the full panel, when it should have only been heard a before a three member panel from the Department of Magical Education. Also it is alleged that you changed the time of this hearing but failed to notify the participants until the last minute so that Lord Harry James Potter would be expelled from Hogwarts for failing to show up at the appointed time. That you deliberately covered up the actions of the Dark Lord in his attacks against both magical and muggle-born families, leaving us defenceless if he chose to attack in full force. And you did knowingly violate the treaty between the magical and muggle government of Great Britain by doing so. As a further abuse of your power it is alleged that you did allow and encourage the Daily Prophet to print lies and slander about Lord Potter and Albus Dumbledore in an attempt to discredit them so no one would believe their claims that He-Who-Must-Not-be-Named was back. That you did place your Undersecretary Delores Umbridge at Hogwarts as Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, even though she was not qualified to teach the position and this was done in an effort to silence Harry Potter and those who believed the claims about Voldemort's return."

Longrim paused for a moment looking up. "How do you plead to these charges?"

Fudge got to his feet. "I plead not guilty to all the charges and I also hereby declare that this court has no authority over me."

Longrim sat down as Dantes ordered, "Protector Delacour, call your first witness."

"Lord Harry James Potter." Delacour called.

As Harry rose from his seat, a comfortable looking straight-backed chair appeared between the tables.

"Lord Potter, how long have you been a part of the wizarding world?" Delacour asked, once Harry had taken the witness seat.

"Approximately seven years," Harry answered calmly.

"Prior to your introduction to the Wizarding World by Rubeus Hagrid, you lived in the muggle world, is that correct?"

"Existed might be more accurate," Harry answered after a moment's thought on how to phrase it, "but yes, I resided in the muggle world."

"When did you first meet the Minister Fudge?" Delacour wanted to know.

"Do you mean when were we first introduced, or when did I first see the man? They aren't necessarily the same thing." Harry explained.

"When were you first introduced to him? And where?" Delacour clarified the question.

"I was introduced to Minister Fudge in the summer before my third year at Hogwarts. He met me at the Leaky Cauldron when I went there to get away from my family after accidentally blowing up Marge Dursley." Harry told him.

“That was the summer Sirius Black escaped from Azkaban.” Delacour commented then asked. “Was it an accidental meeting?”

“No, he was waiting for me inside the Leaky Cauldron.”

“And why was the Minister of Magic, who I am sure was at that time a very busy man waiting there for you?”

“He came to chew me out for running away from my Aunt’s house. He told me that I had caused them a lot of bother, but that they had smoothed all over and I would be welcome back at my Aunt and Uncle’s the next summer.” Harry told him. “Though he was polite about it, he tried to make me feel as if it were my fault that I’d put the Ministry to so much trouble to fix things, even though Marge deserved it.”

“And you didn’t think it was odd that the Minister of Magic had come to do that himself? He could’ve sent an underling to make sure you were ok.”

“Given that I wasn’t raised in the Magical world I had no idea how things worked. I was just glad he wasn’t there to arrest me, so I didn’t really give it much thought.” Harry admitted. “I mean I had seen him have Hagrid arrested on nothing more than suspicion and rumour about the Chamber of Secrets the previous spring so I was expecting the worst.”

Delacour led Harry through the events where he had contact either directly or indirectly with the Minister.

“So the Minister didn’t believe you when you told him that Pettigrew was alive?” Delacour inquired.

“No sir, he thought Granger and I were confounded by Sirius.” Harry told the tribunal. “He wouldn’t listen to a thing we said. He acted like we were five year olds who’d just had an encounter with a boggart. I have never been a child. Growing up with the Dursleys saw to that. Fudge chose to believe Snape, even though he had to know that Snape loathed Sirius and my Father and would like nothing better

than to get back at them. It was a well known fact at Hogwarts during the time they attended school.”

Harry decided to add some additional information for the Tribunal’s consideration. “I did some checking over this past summer and I found that my godfather never received a trial after his arrest. He was condemned to Azkaban without trial. The only record showing at the Ministry of Magic regarding his trial is a single page that says trial is pending. That means that by not even being willing to listen to Granger and I, Fudge had condemned someone who hadn’t even been subjected to the wizard world’s idea of a trial to the Kiss.”

“That is a lie!” Fudge burst out. “Black was tried and found guilty.”

“Oh really?” Harry countered in a drawling voice. “Then why did he retain access to his vaults afterwards? I mean according to a fifty year old law that Gringotts is required to honour, if a person is condemned to life in prison or the Kiss, then all their assets either are given to or held in trust for their heir and if there is no heir, then they are given to the family of the person harmed. The thing is the Goblins before they will comply with this have to have proof the person was convicted. Sirius had no heir at the time he was sent to Azkaban and his assets were never placed in trust for me, so he was never convicted of any crime.”

“Gentlemen, we are getting off the subject here.” Dantes spoke up.

“Actually, I think does go to point out just how incompetent Fudge has been throughout his entire ministerial career.” Harry countered. “But you are right in that it has no bearing on charges of high treason.”

Delacour spoke up before Fudge could make any more comments. “All right Lord Potter lets move on to your fourth year after you returned from completing the third task in the Tournament with the body of Cedric Diggory. What happened when Fudge came into the Hospital Wing of Hogwarts?”

“Fudge and Professor McGonagall were arguing about something Fudge had brought into the castle without Dumbledore’s permission. I got the impression that it was something the Headmaster would not

have approved of. Then he demanded to know where Dumbledore was.”

“Did you ever learn what it was that had Fudge brought into Hogwarts?” Delacour wanted to know.

“It was a Dementor.” Harry reported. “Fudge defended his actions by saying it was his right to bring protection along when he was going to be questioning a potentially dangerous prisoner.”

“And just who was this potentially dangerous prisoner?”

“Barty Crouch Jr who had been impersonating Moody as the Defence against the Dark Arts teacher all year.”

There were gasps from those who had been unaware of this fact.

“Barty Crouch Sr at the request of his dying wife, got him out of Azkaban.” Harry added. “She took his place under polyjuice and was buried as her son when she died.”

“And did Minister Fudge question Crouch about his activities?” Lord Perrivior inquired.

“Not according to what McGonagall and Snape told the Headmaster.” Harry informed him. “She said the minute the Dementor saw Crouch it swooped over and Kissed him.”

Fudge leaned over and whispered something quietly to Madame Bones. She shot him a look of disgust because of it.

“So Crouch was never interrogated?” Bones inquired.

“Not by Fudge. He called the death of Crouch before he could be questioned, ‘no great loss.’” Harry informed her. “Dumbledore had questioned him under Veritaserum though before sending for Fudge. And found that he had helped arrange things so that Moldysorts would get his body back, using my blood along with a few other things.”

“Did the Minister ever question you about the events surrounding the Dark Lord’s return or Cedric Diggory’s death?” Bones wanted to know.

“Nope. Dumbledore didn’t want me questioned that night, but the Minister never tried at any other time either.” Harry told her. “Because of the articles written by Rita Skeeter as revenge, because I wouldn’t give her the interview she wanted and the fact that I am a parselmouth, Fudge believed I was nuts and that anything I said would about as believable as a Dementor winning a muggle beauty pageant. When Dumbledore tried to tell him that Voldemort was back, he called it preposterous. At one point he even told Dumbledore ‘He can’t be back, Dumbledore, he just can’t be...’ I even named the Deatheaters that responded to Voldemort’s summons to the graveyard and all Fudge said was that I could’ve learned their names in transcripts of the trials.”

“Did you ever see transcripts of the trials?” Bones spoke up before Delacour could ask his next question.

“And where would I have gotten my hands on copies of those?” Harry wanted to know. “Prior to my fifth year, the only parts of the wizarding world I had ever spent a lot of time in were Diagon Alley, Hogwarts, the Burrow, and Hogsmeade. I doubt that Ministry records are kept in any of those places.”

“What else occurred in the Hospital wing the night the Dark Lord returned?” Delacour asked.

“Dumbledore made some recommendations that included removing the Dementors from Azkaban, since they would follow Moldysorts in heartbeat, given that he would allow them more freedom than they were getting from the Ministry. He also suggested sending envoys to the Giants.” Harry told them. “Fudge accused all of us of wanting to destabilise the Ministry and destroy the peace that the magical world had enjoyed for the last thirteen years.”

“So to sum it up,” Dantes concluded. “The night the Dark Lord returned, Minister Fudge, who is supposed to be in charge of helping to defend the magical world, stuck his fingers in his ears and sang

nursery rhymes to himself hoping this would all go away. Would that be an accurate assessment, Lord Potter?"

"I couldn't have put it better myself." Harry smiled.

"I will not stand for this!" Fudge shouted out from where he sat at the table. "How dare you compare me to a child! I have always done what is best for the wizarding world! If it were not for me, the magical world would be in chaos right now."

Harry let out a snort of laughter at that last claim. "You actually think you did a good job of protecting the magical world? What kind of drugs are you on?"

"Gentlemen," Dantes spoke up before Fudge could respond. "We are getting off the topic again."

"Actually," Harry mused, "it may be very much on topic, but only time will tell."

"I take no medications other than the ones my healers prescribe for me." Fudge huffed.

"Then I would see about getting a new healer Fudgie," Harry couldn't resist commenting. "They are obviously doing nothing for your delusions, if you thought you were doing a good job as Minister."

"Gentlemen." Dantes' voice contained a note of warning. "Proceed Protector Delacour."

"Let's move on to your hearing regarding the use of underage magic outside of school." Delacour requested. "Please tell the court what happened."

"It started with a pair of Dementors that Under-Secretary Umbridge later admitted setting on me in hopes that they would Kiss me." Harry began. "They nearly Kissed me and my cousin Dudley, not that him being Kissed would've been a great loss. Nor would anyone would've been able to tell the difference with him, given he sits on his arse all day long, when he's not beating up on those younger or smaller than

he is. I drove them off with the Patronus Charm I had learned in my third year, since they seemed to want to kill me then as well.”

Harry paused for a moment reliving the terror he'd felt that night. “I then got a letter telling me someone was coming by to destroy my wand because I'd been expelled from Hogwarts and that I would face a disciplinary hearing at 9 am on August 12. Then I got another letter saying they weren't going to destroy my wand but I still had to attend the hearing. Arthur Weasley took me to the Ministry early intending to show me around a little and it was a good thing he did, because we found out that the time of the hearing had been changed to 8 am, but I was never notified, nor was anyone else who could've helped in my defence. We also found out that the location of the hearing had been changed to courtroom 10, instead of in the Improper Use of Magic office. We just barely made it to the hearing room in time and I found I was going to have to defend myself in front of the whole Wizaengamot.”

“You mean to tell me that not only was the time and place of the hearing was changed, but that they failed to notify you or anyone else of the change?” Lord Altren sounded incensed. “And you had no defender to walk you through the proceedings? That is a violation of the law. A defender should have spoken with you well before the hearing to get an idea of what had happened so a defence could be prepared.”

“That's right,” Harry agreed. “And then Fudge made it sound like it was my fault I was a couple of minutes late, even though I'd only found out about the change in the hearing time ten minutes before and we had to go all the way down to courtroom ten from where the hearing should have been in the Improper Use of Magic Offices. Fudge then attempted to control the hearing from beginning to end but he got a rather rude surprise when Dumbledore appeared in Courtroom 10 and brought with him Arabella Figg the squib who he'd placed in the neighbourhood to keep any eye on me”

“I gather that the hearing went in your favour since you returned to Hogwarts for your fifth year.” Lord Perrivor commented.

"Yes it did," Harry agreed then muttered to himself, "but I'm not so sure that was a good thing. Fudge basically ended the hearing when he realised he wasn't going to be able to get me expelled and he didn't want other things coming to light."

"Lord Potter, after the hearing ended, did you have any further contact with the Minister prior to you going to the Department of Mysteries at the end of your fifth year?" Delacour asked.

"If you mean direct contact, then no." Harry answered after a few moments thought. "I did have indirect contact through all those educational decrees he and Umbridge cooked up that basically turned Hogwarts into a Concentration camp."

"Come now Lord Potter. Isn't that a bit extreme? I can hardly imagine how Hogwarts could be compared to a Nazi Concentration camp." Bones commented. "After all no one died there, and they certainly did in those muggle concentration camps."

"Maybe no one died, but people were certainly tortured under Umbridge's reign at Hogwarts. That's why she's now enjoying all that quality time at the Azkaban spa remember?" Harry countered, then conceded. "Okay, maybe a concentration camp is a bit extreme. One of the old Soviet re-education camps might be nearer to the mark. There were more than a dozen educational decrees created during my fifth year to control what kind of groups could be created within the houses, insuring that our mail was censored so that nothing got out that Umbridge and Fudge didn't want getting out, governing what we were allowed to read and what our teachers could teach us. Umbridge created an Inquisitorial Squad solely out of fifth to seventh year members of Slytherin house and the majority of them were the children of now known Deatheaters. Umbridge brought a Blood Quill into school and used it to torture students who refused to go along with the party line that Moldyshorts wasn't back. And while there were no deaths, we certainly were not allowed the freedom of expression we as British subjects had previously enjoyed."

"Lord Potter," Delacour wanted to finish up Potter's questioning. "What can you tell us about Minister Fudge's involvement in your trial for the murder of Neville Longbottom?"

“Not much, I’m afraid.” Harry admitted. “There were Dementors around my cell day and night and when I was dragged into the courtroom in chains I was still trying to recover from the effects of them, so I couldn’t put on a very good defence.”

“What do you mean you couldn’t put on a very good defence?” Lord Altren demanded. “Surely you were provided with a defender to speak for you?”

“No sir, I was not,” Harry told them. “Or if I was then Fudge probably tried the change of hearing time trick again. I certainly don’t remember speaking to anyone about my defence. Nor do I remember anyone speaking up on my behalf. I wasn’t even given Veritaserum, which would’ve cleared me.”

Lord Perrivor looked over at Fudge. “It looks as though we may have another charge to add: Interfering with a court case to insure that Lord Potter did not receive the fair trial he was entitled to under British magical law.”

Fudge paled slightly.

“Is there anything else you would like to add to the evidence you have presented today, Lord Potter?” Delacour asked.

Harry shrugged. “Not much, except to say that Fudge should never have been elected to the Office of Minister of Magic. I realise it is foolish to expect a politician not to be a self-serving git, but Fudge carries it to the extreme. I mean what kind of idiot would be willing to risk the entire future of the magical world on the hope that I was lying about Voldemort.”

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The trial resumed after a brief recess so everyone could take care of personal needs given that Harry’s testimony had taken several hours to go through. The next up was Dumbledore.

Harry didn't pay much attention to Dumbledore's questioning until Delacour asked, "Given that you were head of the Wizengamot, why did you not push for a delay of Black's execution and a retrial or as we now know it should've been his first trial?"

Dumbledore looked very thoughtful. He could feel the bindings of the very powerful truth spell on him and knew he had to choose his words with care, because the spell wouldn't allow him to lie. "You have to understand Cornelius doesn't like to appear weak in front of anyone. By the time the children came to and told us that Black might be innocent, the Minister had already sent for the Dementor to administer the Kiss and he was not about to delay the sentence."

"Why didn't you order it delayed?" Delacour persisted. "As Head of the Wizengamot, you do have that power."

"I had planned on doing so," Dumbledore hedged and he would have if the children hadn't succeeded in getting Black away. "I had hoped however to make Fudge listen to reason, without forcing such a break between the two branches of our government. Unfortunately all Fudge could see was the acclaim he would get for Black's capture and removal and he would not have liked my interfering no matter how justified it may have been in the end. It was his belief that the Ministry mustn't appear as weak now that they had caught one of the Dark Lord's greatest supporters. If he had persisted in his intention I would have forced the issue before the Dementor could Kiss Black. With Black's escape that intention became a moot point."

Curious Dantes asked, "As Head of the Wizengamot why did you not exercise your authority to push for a new trial for Black once you suspected he might be innocent?"

"I would have once he was recaptured." Dumbledore hedged. "Once he got away, I had the Kiss order rescinded, but giving him a new trial would've had to wait until he was back in custody so that he could be questioned under Veritaserum and the truth learned once and for all."

Rather loudly from where Harry was seated there was heard, "**cough* bullshit *cough* bullshit *cough*.*"

"You disagree with some aspect of Headmaster Dumbledore's testimony, Lord Potter?" Dantes inquired. "You know he can not lie."

"No," Harry agreed, "he can't lie, but he can step very carefully around the truth."

"What are you saying?" Madame Bones demanded.

Harry met Dumbledore's gaze coldly. "I am saying that Dumbledore knew exactly where to find Sirius anytime he wanted to. He could've ordered a new trial at any time and then had Sirius brought in for it, but he didn't." Harry told her. "In fact in my fifth year he all but had Sirius under house arrest at one of the Black family properties, at least until Sirius came to my rescue in the Department of Mysteries and was knocked through the Veil there by his cousin Bellatrix. But that wouldn't have fit in with Dumbledork's plan of keeping me at my relative's because if Sirius were free, by Wizarding law he could take over guardianship of me and Dumbledore couldn't have that."

"And why would Dumbledore want you kept at your muggle relatives if there were someone else with more of a right to take you according to wizard law?" Lord Longrim inquired.

"Who knows why he does anything." Harry shrugged. "My personal opinion is that he wanted me so beaten down, not necessarily physically, though that would've helped his plans, so that I would do whatever he and the wizarding world wanted because I craved their acceptance."

"As fascinating as this is," Dantes put in, "Dumbledore isn't the one on trial... right now."

"You're right my Lord," Amelia agreed. "I will have my people look into it at a later date."

"Please continue Protector Delacour." Dantes requested.

"Headmaster Dumbledore, let's move onto the end of the Triwizard Tournament, where you advised Minister Fudge that the Dark Lord

was back.” Delacour moved on to his next set of questions. “How did the Minister take the news?”

“He refused to believe it.” Dumbledore answered that question honestly. “He accused me of putting young Harry up to it and of trying to destabilise the Ministry, when I made some recommendations on the courses of action he needed to take to try and cut off Voldemort’s potential sources of allies.”

Between Delacour, the High Council, and Bones, Dumbledore’s testimony went on for another hour. Nothing earth shattering came out of it, just more proof as far as Harry was concerned that Fudge wanted to go through life with blinders on if he could. The man should never have been made Minister, because while he loved the title and the prestige that came along with the job, he clearly couldn’t handle the responsibilities and he wasn’t able to make the hard decisions when needed and those decisions he did make were usually the wrong ones. The kind meant to enhance his public image rather than do what was right for the magical world.

The next witnesses were the Weasleys and Snape and their testimony went fairly quickly since the only thing they were questioned about was the incident in the Hospital Wing. Harry couldn’t help smiling as Ginny gave her testimony. Her barking wasn’t all that different from her normal voice as far as he was concerned. He just hoped she learned her lesson and would leave him alone.

After another brief recess, the next witness called was Delores Umbridge.

“Madam Umbridge,” Everyone could hear the contempt in Delacour’s voice as he addressed the toadlike woman. “According to Educational Decree number twenty-two which was passed August 30, 1995, the Minister appointed you as the Defence Against the Dark Arts Teacher when Headmaster Dumbledore was unable to find a suitable candidate. Can you tell us why he felt the need to interfere in the running of a school that had been turning out fine witches and wizards for over a thousand years? And more importantly, can you detail what masteries and qualifications you had that made you uniquely qualified to teach Defence Against the Dark Arts?”

Simpering like a schoolgirl and smiling what she no doubt thought was a pleasant smile, but it actually made everyone who saw it a bit nauseous, Umbridge said, "The Minister felt it was high time that the Department of Magical Education and the Ministry take a firmer grip of the reins of Hogwarts. The teachers who had been teaching there in the last few years were an unmitigated disaster. I mean Dumbledore hired a werewolf... Can you think of anyone who should have less contact with children and be less likely to teach impressionable minds well?"

"Actually madam," Delacour felt compelled to interrupt. "It is a well recorded fact that that the students who took their OWL's and NEWTs the year Professor Remus Lupin, the werewolf as you call him, taught were among the highest for the school in the last fifty years."

"The Minister's point exactly. We should have far more qualified teachers teaching these impressionable minds." Umbridge hurried on. "It isn't right that a werewolf could outdo a regular pureblood wizard in a teaching position."

"Given that claim madam, then I presume you hold a Mastery in Defence against the Dark Arts?" Delacour inquired with a smile. "Which was why Minister Fudge who really had no idea what was required for the position chose you."

When Umbridge remained silent, he went on. "Surely madam, you must have demonstrated your competence at teaching and at Defence Against the Dark Arts in particular to have gained this position. Or were you perhaps appointed for some other reason...? Like to make sure that the truth about the Dark Lord's return never made it beyond the school. In other words to silence Lord Potter and the Headmaster as well as silence anyone else who might speak out against the Ministry?"

"I had an Acceptable in my NEWT level Defence Against the Dark Arts class." Umbridge told him stiffly. "That more than makes me qualified to teach the class."

"I would have thought to teach at such a prestigious institution like Hogwarts, you should have at least an O Level if not years of experience." Delacour commented. "Do you perhaps have years of experience in defending the magical world from the Dark Arts? I see nowhere in your records that you served at any time as an Auror. Did you perhaps gain this experience elsewhere, like out of the country perhaps?"

Umbridge remained silent.

"Enough of this dancing around, madam." Delacour was growing tired of playing with the toad. "Why were you and not someone from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement appointed to teach Defence Against the Dark Arts?"

Umbridge looked at the High Council and said with a certain amount of defiance. "The Minister said he chose me because I was exactly the person needed for the position, so that the children would learn what the Ministry needed for them to know so they could survive in the magical world."

"So the Minister wanted the children of the wizarding world unable to defend themselves." Delacour sounded surprised.

"That is what Aurors are for." Umbridge countered. "They defend the people of the wizarding world from those who want to kill them. The people of the magical world should only have to worry about defending themselves from Boggarts and the like."

"But Aurors can't be everywhere," Lord Pervor pointed out. "Not to mention the fact that new Aurors have to be trained and they need to know the basics of how to defend themselves from more creatures than simple boggarts. You taught no practical spell casting so how were the children to learn the spells. Merlin help the magical world if you had managed to last more than a year."

"They can read, that gave them all they needed to know." Umbridge persisted. "Besides, the students who took their OWLs and NEWTs scored the highest Hogwarts ever had during my tenure."

"Only because of the DA," Harry put in, unwilling to let the toad claim all his hard work. "I can prove that the only ones who scored exceptionally well on either the OWLs or NEWTs were those in the DA. The rest failed or barely passed and that's probably because they had prior training at home."

Umbridge just glared hatefully at Harry, but made no comment.

"Umbridge, where did you get the Blood Quill from?" Delacour asked his next question. "It is a Class 1 Restricted item. It is used solely for magical contracts requiring a blood signature and as such only the Ministry's Legal offices and Gringotts are allowed to be in possession of one. Was it supplied by the Minister?"

"No, the Minister did not supply it. I took it from the Auror evidence lockup. It had been there for over fifty years, so I knew no one would miss it." Umbridge admitted. "I knew I was going to need something to control the more stubborn children and pain has always been a powerful motivator."

"So Fudge didn't suggest you bring anything to as you said control the more stubborn children?" Delacour wanted to know.

Umbridge tried to avoid answering, but the truth spell forced her to. "No, the minister knew nothing about how I intended to control the more stubborn children like Potter. I think he expected the decrees to keep them in line since no one wanted the stigma of being expelled from Hogwarts following them around. I knew better though. I've seen children like that brat Potter before. You have to rule them with fear to keep them in line."

"I think that we all on the council are pleased that no matter how drunk with power and love of his position Fudge was he at least didn't stoop to knowingly condoning the torture of children." Lord Longrim put in. "Though he should have picked his underlings better. This makes what three members of your staff Cornelius, who have proven to be a liability?"

(AN: I promise Fudige's trial is not ending here, but due to file size limitations on some sites this story is posted on, I have to stop this section of the trial here so that all postings would be the same.)

Of Men and Mice

Umbridge's testimony had taken about two hours. It would've gone quicker if the toad hadn't felt the need to choose her words with such care forcing Delacour to repeat or rephrase every question until he got the whole truth out of her. The woman was trying to avoid admitting to any more crimes than she already had. Harry personally considered it a wasted effort, given she probably wasn't going to see the outside of Azkaban while she was still alive. Given that fact what were a few more years added on to her sentence?

The High Council decided to call for a lunch break after Umbridge was escorted from the witness chair. As soon as they did the configuration of the room changed. Along one wall a table with all kinds of different food appeared and as soon as the members of the court headed toward it, to serve themselves, the chairs were replaced by table and chair sets of varying sizes around the room.

Harry chose one of the two seater tables against the far wall as did Dantes, though not the same table.

For the most part Dumbledore left Harry alone during lunch however Dantes was another matter. Having recognized the House badge on Dantes' robes as that of Ravenclaw; Dumbledore felt he needed to speak with him. If he could get the current Head of the House Ravenclaw on his side, Hogwarts would be a lot easier to run. Knowing how difficult it was to find a copy of the charter that had ceded control of Hogwarts to the people of Magical Britain, Dumbledore doubted that new Lord Ravenclaw had read it. It had taken Dumbledore months to locate the copy that was kept at Hogwarts and he had started looking for it when Fudge had tried to take over his school. The Headmaster was determined prevent the Ministry from ever gaining control of Hogwarts again and with Dantes' help as one of the Founder's heirs, the Ministry's influence would be all but eliminated.

"Lord Ravenclaw," Dumbledore stood on the other side of the table and gestured to the empty seat. "May I join you?"

"No." Dantes said not looking up from the document he was reading.

"I would like to discuss a business matter with you." Dumbledore tried again.

"What part of 'no' do you not understand?" Dantes asked looking up. "I would like to enjoy my meal in peace, but you are interrupting it, Headmaster Dumbledore."

"I do apologise," Dumbledore told him. "I will leave you in peace then, but I would like to ask if you would care to meet with me sometime in the next few weeks. I do have a very important matter I would like to discuss with you."

"If it will get you to go away, I will think about it!" The brown haired man growled.

Dumbledore nodded graciously and made a mental note to send Dantes an owl in a few days to remind him.

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Ginny had finally been able to convince her mother to put her down and now she was going to go find Harry. She wanted to have lunch with him. With everyone still seated having lunch it was a lot easier to move around without the risk of being kicked or stepped on. She was determined to find Harry. She was going to have lunch with her boyfriend!

Her nose led Ginny to two tables on the far side of the room and both of them had a chair with Harry's scent on it. She stared back and forth between them for several minutes before her nose picked up a familiar scent: Headmaster Dumbledore's! The Headmaster must've been trying to talk Harry into changing her back, as he had done so earlier when her mother had demanded the court to intervene. He would after all have no reason to want to talk to that Dantes person who smelled enough like Harry to fool her for a little while.

Hopping up into Harry's empty chair, Ginny stared at the food on the plate. It looked like rice and meat in some kind of bitter smelling sauce. While the partially eaten meal looked appetising, the sharp

bitter smell made Ginny's currently sensitive nose burn. Why would Harry want to eat something that smelled so bad?

Figuring that if Harry liked it and he must given that half of it was gone, Ginny decided to ignore the messages her nose was sending her and quickly gulped down several mouthfuls. She knew that even though Harry was mad at her right now because of what she'd done to that meddling bitch Luna, he wouldn't mind sharing with her. After all he had often shared his treats off the train trolley with her before so this was no different.

Ginny had just taken another mouthful when a pair of unfamiliar hands plucked her off Harry's chair and a voice she recognized as belonging to that Dantes fellow who smelled a lot like Harry, shouted. "What do you think you are doing?"

Ginny's stomach didn't react well to the sudden movement. Just before the contents started coming back up the way they had gone down, she felt like a seeker who had executed a Wronski Feint from too high up. A moment later her body started ripple and heave as she opened her mouth and gave out a couple of hacking doggie coughs followed by a deep long aggggghhh. The next moment the partially digested meal was adorning Dantes robes and sliding down them to the floor in a drippy gooey mass.

The smell of the regurgitated curry was almost enough to make Dantes want to vomit. Hearing a sound like there was going to be more heaving, Dantes quickly held the dog-girl at arms length only to catch sight of a lime green robe hurrying toward the rest room. Dantes quickly buried the feeling of satisfaction he felt at Fudge's reaction to the vomit and vented his anger at the girl's stupidity. "Are you that stupid?! Do you not know there are some foods a dog is not meant to eat? Did it not cross your tiny little mind that Curry just like chocolate is not meant to be eaten by dogs."

"Vernon's sister Marge, if she didn't kill her first, would've had a bitch that stupid fixed, if she'd seen her do something like that." Harry commented as he came over to stand by Dantes. "She definitely wouldn't have allowed a bitch that stupid to breed."

Molly Weasley stormed over and pulled Ginny out of Dantes' hands. Glaring at Potter as though she wished he were dead. "My daughter is not stupid!"

"Well she definitely doesn't use her brains, madam." Dantes couldn't resist commenting. "After all her nose should've told her that curry is not meant for a dog. Not to mention the fact that she shouldn't have been trying to steal other people's food. If she were really a dog I might've expected that kind of behaviour, but given she is a human turned into a dog, she should know that taking something without permission is wrong. Or didn't you teach your children right from wrong?"

He gazed speculatively at her. "I'm beginning to wonder if your Great Aunt Muriel was the only rotten apple in the Prewitt tree."

Molly Weasley's mouth opened and closed several times, before she spat out. "How dare you impugn my family's honour? You will pay for that Dantes. If it is the last thing I do you will pay for your comments."

Dantes simply yawned in her face before turning his back on her.

"I challenge you to a Wizard's Duel?" Molly Weasley ground out from between clenched teeth.

Dantes turned to look at her in disbelief. "A Wizard's Duel? Are you serious?"

The room had gone silent at Molly's challenge.

"Yes," Molly refused to back down. "You have insulted my family and my honour for the last time."

"Very well madam," Dantes agreed lazily. "Lord Potter, will you act as my second?"

"Certainly." Harry agreed.

"Who will be your second, madam?" Dantes asked.

“My husband will be?” Molly told them.

“And when would you like to do this, madam?”

“Now.” Molly told him.

“I’m afraid that is not possible, Mrs. Weasley.” Lord Altren spoke up. “The wards on this chamber once they are raised prevent any kinds of offensive magics from being done.”

“We will have this duel a week from the day the hearing ends, at 10 am.” Dantes told her “and it will be a paintball duel. I think the best place for it would be at Hogwarts in the Great Hall since my Second will be back there. Will that be acceptable, madam?”

“Paintball?” Molly stared at him in confusion.

“We hit dodge and fire colour splatter hexes at each other.” Dantes explained. “The loser is the one covered in the most paint or colour.”

“I’m talking about a proper wizard’s duel,” Molly countered angrily. “That is not a game.”

“Are you really that anxious to die, madam?” Dantes countered seriously. “I am a master dueller. I have fought multiple Death Eaters before and come out alive while they wound up dead or in prison. You would not defeat me in a regular wizard’s duel. When I fight, I fight to win and you madam would either wind up seriously injured or dead if we fought a normal duel.”

Molly stared at him and could tell he was deadly serious.

When she remained silent Dantes asked, “Are my terms now acceptable, or do you really wish to leave your children without a mother? All of my previous duels with the exception of the ones I fought in school have been to the death, and that is how I will approach this one and I won’t need Unforgivables either.”

Arthur stepped up before Molly could say anything further and told him, “They are.”

“Now that the floor show is over, can we get back to the reason we are here?” Lord Perrivior requested. “It is time for the Defender to present her case.”

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Fudge ran his fingers nervously along the collar of his lime green robes as he walked slowly toward the witness chair.

Harry had to fight to keep himself from laughing. The fool was giving the appearance of a condemned man walking the last mile in one of those old non-magical movies he'd watched over the summer. “Let's not take all day about this, Fudgie. And stop trying to milk the crowd for sympathy. I think the only one in this room who might give a damn about whether you feel like you are the injured party here is Umbitch and that's only because she sees you as her way out of Azkaban. The rest of us all know how you deliberately endangered us.”

Fudge glared at Potter, unwilling to say anything that would put the Councillors more firmly against him. He'd been playing the political game long enough to know when to tread very carefully. He was fairly certain the Councillors would side with one of their own over him even though a couple of them also sat on the Wizengamot a panel he had largely controlled for the last few years.

Once he was seated, Bones got to her feet and asked her first question. “Minister Fudge, did you take monies from known Deatheaters and then appoint them to positions of power within the Ministry of Magic?”

“Of course not!” Fudge declared indignantly. “I never would've taken money from known Deatheaters.”

“What about those who were accused but not convicted of being Deatheaters, during the Dark Lord's first Reign of Terror that was ended by Mr Potter in 1980?” Delacour inquired.

Fudge looked slightly worried for a moment before saying, "I only took contributions to some of my favourite charities from those who had been cleared of being Deatheaters."

"And what charities did they contribute the monies to at your request?" Perrivore wanted to know.

"The Improve Wizard and Muggle Relations Trust." Fudge told them. "It was created by a group of concerned witches and wizards after they thought He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named was gone for good, to try and help those muggles who were hurt by Deatheaters and those in the magical community who were also harmed by them. I thought it a suitable charity to direct them to, since they had inadvertently done a great deal of harm while under the Imperious curse and this was a way for them to make amends."

"Odd," Lord Altren commented. "I have never heard of this charitable trust before. I gave to a number of the charities that were helping both the magical and muggle worlds rebuild after the Dark Lord's supposed demise. Just who ran the charity?"

"I have no idea." Fudge mumbled. "The contributions and finances were handled by the goblins at Gringotts and you know how they honour their obligations."

Lord Altren looked over at the Defender. "Madame Bones, once this hearing is over, would you please arrange to have someone investigate this trust?"

"Certainly, my Lord," Bones agreed, noting the sudden pallor on Fudge's face. She turned her attention back to the charges. "Minister Fudge, did you appoint these cleared Deatheaters to positions of power or influence in the Ministry?"

"Not directly, I made recommendations to Department Heads that they might be good for this job or that one. And they were." Fudge added in his own defence as he played with the collar of his robe again.

“Do we have any copies of the letters of recommendation that Fudge gave to the relevant Department heads?” Lord Kieran wanted to know.

Delacour’s assistant checked the pile of scrolls in front of them and then shook his head.

After a moment’s consultation with the other members of the High Council, Lord Kieran announced, “We will let the claim of indirect influence stand, though it would be a given that if the Minister made a recommendation to the Head of a Department and that Department Head wanted to keep their job they would have hired that Deatheater, no matter whether they were competent at their job or not. Though Madame Bones, if any of those former Deatheaters were placed in your Department based on the Minister’s recommendation, prior to you taking over, we would like to see a copy of the letter the previous department head was sent.”

“Of course my lords,” Bones nodded. She would be going through her department with a fine-toothed comb to see if any Deatheater or someone they had recommended had gotten a job in her Department and if so they were going to be put to the question even if they had no Dark Mark. “Minister Fudge, Let us move on for now to the day Rubeus Hagrid was arrested for supposedly opening the Chamber of Secrets, a task we all now know he could not have accomplished since it requires a parselmouth to open it. Why, Minister, did you feel it necessary to go to Hogwarts yourself and arrest Hagrid?”

“I decided that we in the Ministry needed to get a handle on this situation before it got out of control.” Fudge told them. “I knew it wouldn’t be too much longer before someone remembered that Hagrid had been thought to be the culprit the first time and I thought they might attack him. I simply took him into protective custody.”

Fudge sat straighter in the chair trying to look brave and dignified, but Harry personally thought he looked like that arrogant rooster Dudley used to watch in that American cartoon show. What was he called...? Harry thought for a moment, trying to remember the name because at the time, he’d thought the rooster reminded him a lot of Uncle Vernon. Then it came to him.... Foghorn Leghorn. Now that he thought about

it that Rooster was a perfect match for Fudge or any other politician on the face of the planet... whether magical or muggle.

"I discussed the issue with one of my top advisors," Fudge continued. "And they agreed it was best to place Hagrid in protective custody, that way if he was guilty we had him where he couldn't do any harm and if he wasn't, then he would be safe from those who might wish to do him harm."

"*cough* Malfoy *cough* *cough*" Harry muttered from his seat in the row behind Delacour's table.

"Lord Potter, please let the man testify on his own without any comments from the gallery." Lord Perrivore requested though Harry thought there was a slight grin on his face.

"Minister Fudge, you do realise just how stupid that sounds don't you?" Delacour pointed out. "You took a man who had little more than a third year magical education and hadn't been convicted of any crime from Hogwarts one of the safest locations in Wizarding Britain and you put him in Azkaban. Even if they weren't in the section of the prison where he was to be confined, how was Hagrid protected from the Dementors, given their effect can be felt throughout the whole prison even the levels where minor prisoners are kept? He could have just as easily have been placed in protective custody in one of the unused towers of Hogwarts or in one of it's dungeon chambers. Or if you didn't want to leave him at Hogwarts, why didn't you place him in a Ministry holding cell? And if you really thought he might be a danger why didn't you take any Aurors with you, in case he tried to make a break for it?"

"I didn't need Aurors," Fudge said pompously. "Dumbledore had accompanied me and given that he took out Grindelwald, I felt he should be able to handle Hagrid if he got out of control. As for why Azkaban, my advisor suggested it so that we could show the public we were doing something about the situation at Hogwarts."

"And who was this foolish advisor that suggested you should imprison an innocent man in hell without a trial?" Lord Longbottom wanted to know.

Fudge muttered something too low for them to hear.

“Speak up Fudge.” Longrim ordered. “You always manage to talk loud enough when you have nothing to say.”

Fudge finally said, “Lucius Malfoy was the one who suggested it. He said it would make people feel safer about their children remaining at Hogwarts.”

Dantes gave him a disgusted look. “And you can honestly sit there and say that it didn’t cross your tiny little mind that you were about to do something illegal? Nor did it apparently occur to you that you didn’t have the authority to arrest and send someone to Azkaban. Not to mention that it was an abuse of the powers of the office of the Minister to place someone there who hadn’t been found guilty of any crime.”

Fudge looked at Dantes with a dumbfounded look. “Of course I can. I’m the Minister, and if I think someone is guilty of a crime, I can have them arrested or even do it myself.”

“But he wasn’t guilty was he?” Delacour put in. “You had an innocent man arrested and sent to Azkaban without trial. You may have put a polite face on it by calling it protective custody, but we all know what it really was.”

“The Ministry had to be seen to be doing something.” Fudge burst out tired of the accusations. “There was a lot of public pressure to get the situation resolved. The Department of Magical Law Enforcement wasn’t moving fast enough and so I took steps to get them more time and reassure the public. That is part of my job.”

Lord Longrim commented dryly. “I would like to see where in the job description for Minister of Magic it says when the public starts demanding action on a situation the Minister must find a convenient scapegoat, even if they aren’t guilty of any crime so the public can feel better about the government.”

“It isn’t in the job description,” Fudge countered stiffly. “It is one of those things you learn on the job. Do whatever it takes to keep the

public calm and under control. Whether it is listening to some old pure bloods waffle on about how the muggleborns are ruining our society and how they were kept under better control when they were younger, or listening to the complaints of a Muggleborn about how they aren't treated fairly in wizard society. The situation at Hogwarts was getting out of hand and Dumbledore didn't seem to be able to do something about it, so the Ministry had to give the appearance of having done something."

"By arresting an innocent man." Lord Kieran reminded him yet again. "I have a feeling you wouldn't be quite so cavalier about it if it had been you or a member of your family treated that way by the Minister of Magic."

The High Council conferred for a few moments, and Dantes announced. "It is agreed that Minister Fudge did intentionally or not abuse the power of his office, by exercising authority he did not have to arrest Rubeus Hagrid and confine him to the prison of Azkaban, given he hadn't even been accused of a crime. Compensation will be paid to Mr. Hagrid, from Cornelius Fudge's personal accounts for the harm done to him, said amount to be determined by this court at the end of the hearing. Please move on to the next charge Madame Bones."

Bones wasn't really sure how to phrase a question about this charge that wouldn't make Fudge look guilty. "When you were told by both Mr. Harry Potter and Miss Hermione Granger that you had the wrong man and that Sirius Black wasn't guilty of the crimes he'd been imprisoned for, why didn't you delay ordering the Dementor's Kiss and instead order a new trial?"

Fudge was silent for several minutes not wanting to sound like a fool again. "There was no reason to. Severus Snape, a man Dumbledore trusted, was an eyewitness to the events. Snape's testimony, that Mr. Potter and Miss Granger had been threatened by Black and the way the pair acted once they had regained consciousness, made it quite clear that he had managed to place them under a confundus charm to make them believe he was innocent. The man was guilty. He'd had a trial twelve years ago. Crouch was the one who saw to that. After all he presided over almost all of the prominent Death eater trials,

including his own son's. I saw no need to waste Ministry funds on a new trial when he had done such a thorough job the first time around."

"You were aware were you not that Snape and Black hated each other while in school almost to a level to rival Snape and Potter's hatred of each other. Why would you take his word, since he would've loved to remove the man from his life for good?" Bones wanted to know.

"Given that Dumbledore has spoken so highly of Snape over the years and about what an honourable man he was, I saw no reason to think he would lie, given a man's life was at stake." Fudge told her.

"Did Snape tell you he was unconscious or not present for most of the events that occurred in the Shrieking Shack that night?" Delacour inquired. "For that matter, since you apparently didn't wish to listen to the children who had been present, why didn't you at least delay the Kiss until you could speak to the only other adult who had been present... the Defence teacher Remus Lupin?"

"That werewolf!" Fudge couldn't believe the man. "We have never accepted the testimony of Dark Creatures in a trial involving someone who uses Dark magic. It is well known that they will side with the Dark Magic user."

Delacour looked at the ceiling for a moment. "And some wonder why Magical Britain seems to produce the most Dark Lords. Fudge, prior to his destruction by Lord Potter, how many so called Dark creatures had joined the Death Eaters?"

Thinking he wanted a listing, Fudge told him, "The giants did. So did the Vampires. As well as the werewolves led by Fenrir Greyback."

"Did every member of those races you listed join the Dark Lord, or was it only those who were tired of being treated like they were little more than animals in the eyes of wizards and witches?" Delacour wanted to know.

“How should I know?” Fudge didn’t understand what he was getting at. “I don’t know each individual werewolf or vampire. I would assume so, since it is a well known fact that dark creatures tend to gravitate to those who practise Dark magic.”

“Not all werewolves joined Greyback at the Dark Lord’s side.” Delacour countered. “Lupin never did. He spent his life trying to serve the Light and wizardkind, but you in magical Britain wouldn’t let him. Dumbledore also trusted him. You claimed that you accepted Snape’s testimony as fact even though he was not conscious through all the events that happened simply because Dumbledore spoke so highly of him. Why wouldn’t you extend Lupin the same courtesy? He had done the same many times for Lupin, why didn’t you give him the same courtesy and at least delay giving Black the Kiss until you could speak with him, or since there was some question about his guilt, why didn’t you interrogate him at Hogwarts. There was a Potions master on staff who was licensed by the Ministry to produce Veritaserum for the Ministry. It would have delayed things maybe thirty minutes, but you would’ve known for sure you were indeed executing a guilty man.”

“And let’s not forget, we still do not know how Black escaped.” Dantes spoke up. “I would have thought the Ministry even then would’ve wanted to know how he’d done it. Or weren’t you curious enough to delay a man’s death long enough to find that out, so that you could prevent it from happening again? Not to mention the fact that Black at least according to reports I have heard, was in fact sane even after over ten years in Azkaban’s Maximum Security wing and that is definitely not supposed to be possible. I would’ve thought you would’ve been curious about that as well so you could deal with it.”

“The decree to have Black kissed was issued by the Wizengamot and there were no extenuating circumstances provided to delay it. He was to be Kissed as soon as a Dementor could be brought to him.” Fudge countered. “I was not about to go against a legal decree.”

Harry muttered, but not loud enough for anyone but Delacour to hear him. “Why not? You’ve done it before when it suited your purposes.”

There was a longer discussion this time and from the gestures coming from the High Councillors behind the silencing ward, it was also getting quite heated.

Finally Dantes spoke again. "The opinion on this charge is divided. While we all agree that there should've been a delay in carrying out the Wizengamot's decree, some feel that as Minister you could not delay it. A stay should have been ordered by Albus Dumbledore as soon as there was some doubt about Black's guilt, given he is the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot. Or if there had been more members of the Wizengamot present that night than just the two of you a vote could have been taken on whether or not to delay it, long enough to question Black under Veritaserum and learn the truth once and for all. You are declared innocent on that charge, solely because it was a decree from the Wizengamot."

After a moment's pause, Dantes added, "We have also decided that since the Chief Warlock does have the authority to delay the carrying out a sentence if there is a claim of new evidence, even without other members of the Wizengamot being present, he should have exercised that authority. Especially given that Dumbledore stated in his testimony before this High Court that he did believe there was enough reason to delay the Kiss. It is our judgement that Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore has failed in his duties as Chief Warlock by not ordering the immediate stay of execution for Sirius Orion Black and shall be removed from the Wizengamot permanently since it appears that he can not properly carry out those duties along with his duties as Headmaster and Supreme Mugwump of the IWC."

There was a loud "Yes!" and as everyone looked in the direction of the voice they recognized as Potter's they saw him pumping his fist in the air as if in triumph. "One for you Sirius!"

"Lord Potter, a little decorum please." Lord Altren requested, just barely smothering the smile that was trying to make its way on to his face.

Harry looked over at Dumbledore and the expression on his face made Harry wish he had a camera. Dumbledore looked like he'd been told that Moldysnorts was his love child and that he owed some

witch decades of back child support. Or maybe that he'd just been told there were no more lemon drops in the world. A quick glance at Fudge showed that he was pleased by their decision. Probably, Harry reflected, because someone was finally sticking it to Dumbledore and Dumbles wasn't able to do a damn thing to stop it.

"My Lords surely there is no reason to go to this extreme." Dumbledore spoke up a few minutes later. "I have served the Wizarding world faithfully for many years. I will grant you there are a few decisions I could have made differently, but over all, I have done nothing but good for the wizarding world."

"Really," Dantes drawled. "It is the considered opinion of the High Council that you Albus Dumbledore took the easy way out instead of doing the right thing in the matter of Sirius Black. As the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, the final authority rests with you on whether or not an execution is stayed for any reason. You claim that you didn't do so, because you didn't want to cause a split within the Ministry, but you knew there were questions about Black's guilt and yet you failed to do the right thing. What would've happened if Black hadn't managed to escape? He would no be without his soul because you didn't want to ...what is the American expression?" Dantes looked thoughtful for a moment, "Oh yes, you didn't want to make waves. That is not the kind of person who should be Chief Warlock. It should be someone who is capable of making the hard decisions and doing the right thing even if it makes waves."

Lord Perrivior felt compelled to speak up, "And Albus, don't even think of trying to get the members of the Wizengamot to try and overturn this ruling. The High Council's rulings supersede their's. If you try and take a seat on the Wizengamot, you will be forcibly ejected from the Ministry by the spells on the chambers where the Wizengamot meet."

"Hey," Ron blurted out suddenly remembering, "Fudge didn't have orders to have Barty Crouch Jr Kissed. I mean no one on the Wizemgamot gave orders for his death given they thought he was dead, so Fudge wasn't acting on their orders then. You surely aren't going to wave the charge on that are you?"

The council members looked startled at being reminded about Fudge's having had the Deatheater Crouch Kissed and Fudge just glared daggers at the youngest Weasley son. They hadn't added it to the list of charges facing him when Potter had brought it up before and he was hoping they had forgotten about it.

"We will take a brief break while we review the previous testimony." Lord Keiran announced.

Ron couldn't help the smug smile that appeared on his face after all it was he who reminded these high and mighty Lords that Fudge has still had someone Kissed by a Dementor without sanction. Ron got the additional pleasure from knowing that an additional charge regarding using a Dementor to silence someone could be added to the already massive list of charges against the Minister. Ron really didn't care one way or another that Crouch had been kissed he was a Deatheater after all, but he disliked Fudge and had since the end of his fourth year at Hogwarts, when the man had refused to believe that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named was back.

A quick summoning spell pulled one stack of parchment that the testimony had been written on to the High Councillors table. It took a few minutes to find the relevant section of Harry's testimony.

Lord Kieran glared at Fudge. "Did you really bring a Dementor into Hogwarts without the sanction of the Headmaster of the school?"

"It was my right to bring protection into a dangerous situation." Fudge blustered. "I had just been told a dangerous Deatheater had been captured on the school grounds and so I summoned a Dementor to accompany me and protect me, just in case."

"You didn't trust the Staff of Hogwarts to keep you safe?" Lord Longrim asked the next question. "I mean earlier you testified that you took no Aurors with you to arrest Mr. Hagrid, because you had Dumbledore with you, and you felt then he was protection enough. What changed your mind about Dumbledore being enough protection?"

"Of course not!" Fudge seemed indignant. "They'd just captured a Deatheater within the very walls of the school. I wasn't about to trust my safety to them. As for Dumbledore, the Deatheater had been impersonating a close friend of his for over nine months and he hadn't caught on. It was clear that his abilities to protect the Wizarding world were beginning to be highly overrated."

"Then why didn't you summon a pair of Aurors? That would have been a far more appropriate choice." Lord Altren wanted to know.

"Why would I expect them to be able to defend me from a Deatheater that managed to get past Dumbledore?" Fudge countered scathingly.

"You expected them to be able to defend you later on, once you finally admitted the Dark Lord was back." Perrivor reminded him. "I for one would like to know why you would bring a Dementor as a bodyguard to Hogwarts when you were simply there to judge the last task of the Triwizard Tournament?"

"I didn't," Fudge countered. "I summoned it once I was told about the Deatheater currently being held prisoner in the castle by Snape."

"Even though you knew that Dumbledore would not approve of such a creature setting foot over the threshold of Hogwarts without a valid reason." Lord Altren couldn't believe the stupidity of the man to actually bring a Dementor into a school full of children.

"It was my right to have protection with me when questioning a dangerous prisoner." Fudge gave them the same reasoning he'd given in the Hospital Wing the night of Crouch's death and Voldemort's resurrection.

"And did you order the Dementor to Kiss Barty Crouch Jr before he could be questioned?" Dantes asked.

"No!" Fudge was aghast that they would think so. He had always followed the law, except when it came to Potter.

"What do you mean no?" Potter spoke up from where he was seated.

"I didn't order the Dementor to Kiss Crouch." Fudge protested, not realizing that the person who'd asked the question didn't have a right to expect an answer.

"Lord Potter," Dantes spoke up after a whispered conversation with Lord Perrivor. "You are here as a witness today not a member of the Council. Please do not interrupt the proceedings again or we will have to silence you."

"Now Fudge, you say you didn't order the Dementor to Kiss Barty Crouch that means it was a rogue? Did you bother to report it to the department that is supposed to deal with dangerous magical creatures so it could be destroyed?" Perrivor inquired. "That is the law you know."

Fudge paled when he realised he had forgotten to order the Dementor he had taken into Hogwarts destroyed. "No my lord I did not. In all the confusion afterwards I forgot to do so and simply sent it back to Azkaban."

"Am I to understand that you, the Minister of Magic, failed to report a rogue Dementor and also failed to order its destruction?" Longrim wanted to make sure he had his facts straight. "Thereby endangering the lives of the prison guards and others who routinely visit the facility because they had no way of knowing the Dementor was a rogue."

"Yes sir," Fudge hung his head trying to look pitiful over his failure.

"My Lords," Bones spoke up. "You have to take into account that Minister Fudge hasn't had to face death day in and day out, like an Auror does. He was probably in a state of shock at the Dementor's actions when he failed to report it."

"He got over the shock fairly quickly." Dantes commented dryly. "Given that a short time later he was able to claim the death of the younger Mr. Crouch as 'no great loss' according to the testimony we have here from Lord Potter."

"It is still possible that he was in shock." Bones continued with the only argument she had to get this charge negated before it could be added to the growing list.

"Professor Snape," Dantes spoke to the former Potions professor seated against the wall between a pair of Aurors.

Snape rose to his feet and spoke in a low voice that carried. "Yes my Lord."

"You were with Minister Fudge the whole time from when you told him about Mr Crouch to when he left the Hospital Wing were you not?" Dantes decided to settle this once and for all.

"I was." Snape agreed.

"And while not a fully licensed medi-wizard, you have enough medical knowledge to recognize the symptoms of shock do you not?"

"In about nine out of ten cases, yes," Snape told him. "Sometimes the symptoms can be missed, if the shock is a subtle one."

"And in your opinion would someone seeing a Dementor use its most lethal weapon be considered a subtle or sudden shock?" Dantes inquired.

After a few moments of silence Snape finally answered. "If they had never seen it happen before, then it would be a sudden shock. And if you are going to ask if Fudge exhibited any symptoms of sudden shock, then I must answer unequivocally no he did not."

The silencing ward went up again and there was an even longer conference between the Councillors than there had been over the issue of Sirius Black.

Finally the ward went down and Dantes gave them the decision of the High Council on this charge. "While we will not be adding a charge of murder by Dementor to the list against Cornelius Fudge, we do hereby find him guilty of the crime of failing the report the rogue Dementor to

the proper authorities so that it could be put down. We also add the charge of endangering the warders of Azkaban Prison, because he failed to report the action to them as well, so they could take steps to isolate the rogue from the rest of the population within the prison walls. We are also adding a charge of deliberately endangering the lives of the children attending Hogwarts.”

“I didn’t endanger the children at Hogwarts!” Fudge protested.

“Oh really,” Lord Kieran countered. “What do you think that Dementor would have done if it hadn’t been satisfied with the soul of Barty Crouch? It would have killed you and Snape and then because the Headmaster didn’t know it was within the walls so he could ward off the dormitories, it would have had a free run at the pride of the next generation.”

“You admitted brining it in... without letting Dumbledore know it was coming.” Perrivor reminded him. “If that rogue had killed single child you would have been held accountable; legally, morally, and financially and if you had been Kissed then your heir would have been made accountable for your actions. While that did not happen, thank Merlin, the situation should not have occurred in the first place. That Dementor should not have been brought within the walls of Hogwarts without the Headmaster’s knowledge and consent.”

Fudge gulped at the thought of the Dementor actually Kissing him as well. It was quite clear to those watching that the thought of that happening had never occurred to the man. Personally, Harry couldn’t see why the idiot was so worried about a Dementor Kissing him. He doubted there would be any real change in the man given Fudge had no soul to lose.

Harry shuddered slightly at the thought of Fudge having kids. The image of Fudge as a proud father was only slightly more appealing image than the thought of Umbridge as a mother. Now there was an image that should be the stuff of nightmares. Umbridge as a cooing mother!

“The judgement stands,” Dantes told him. “Let’s move on to the next charge shall we; the failure of your office Fudge to notify all

participants of the change in time for the trial you had ordered for a simple under-aged magic charge. Since you were listed as the lead interrogator that responsibility rested solely with your office Fudge. As well as the secondary charge that goes along with it of abusing the power of your office to have it held before the full Wizengamot, instead of a simple three member panel from the Department of Magical Education, which is the normal procedure in such a case.”

(AN: Decided this was good place to end this chapter due to the file size limitations on some of the sites where I post this story. I've found that in that case to make sure things don't get cut off, about 80-90k about the safest size to up load and while this one not that big, if I had cut it off at the point where I realized the chapter was going to exceed that limit, believe me you would've hated me more. There will be a 3rd part to Fudge's trial. Who knew Fudge bashing could take so long or be so much fun. LOL)

Sliding Down a Slippery Slope

“Minister Fudge, who in your office was responsible for sending out the notices regarding the change of time for young Mr. Potter’s under-aged magic hearing?” Madame Bones asked. “I know I got my notification the night before and several other members of the panel got their notifications early that morning because they barely made it to the hearing on time.”

Fudge tried to look dignified and responsible as he told the High Council, “I entrusted the task of making sure the notifications went out on time to then Undersecretary Delores Umbridge.”

“And did you stress to her how important it was that everyone who was supposed to be at the hearing receive their letter in a timely manner?” Bones wanted to know.

“Of course!” Fudge managed to sound offended. “Delores knew how important it was that this hearing be conducted in the proper manner. I trusted her to take care of the matter appropriately.”

Madame Bones turned her attention to Umbridge who was seated in a chair several feet away from Snape. “Miss Umbridge, what was your understanding of how the letters, notifying the participants about the change in time for Lord Potter’s underage magic hearing, should be delivered?”

Umbridge stared at Fudge through narrowed eyes, not really surprised that he would try and place the blame wholly on her shoulders. Politics was a cutthroat business after all, but she wasn’t going to let him get away with that. While she couldn’t read the High Councillors that well, she was fairly certain just from the charges that had already been confirmed that Fudge was likely to lose his office, if not wind up spending time in Azkaban, so why not help add to his punishment, since he was indirectly responsible for her have to spend the rest of her life there.

Trying to sound like she was innocent of any wrongdoing, Umbridge told them, “The Minister instructed me to make sure all participants were notified in a timely manner. He also stressed how disastrous it

would be if Mr. Potter and Dumbledore failed to make it to the hearing in time because then the Wizengamot would have no choice but to rule on the facts they had which was that he had indeed done magic in a muggle area.”

“And how did you interpret that rather peculiar emphasis that Fudge had placed on Lord Potter and Albus Dumbledore possibly missing the hearing?” Lord Longrim inquired.

Umbridge paused for several moments as if in thought then replied, “I took it to mean that their letters shouldn’t be sent out until the last possible minute, so that we could claim they had been sent in time. I had someone on the security desk notify me the minute Mr. Potter arrived at the Ministry and then arranged for the post owls to be sent out to them both.”

“So you took it upon yourself to delay the letters to Lord Potter and Headmaster Dumbledore?” Bones wanted confirmation.

“I did as I was instructed by the Minister.” Umbridge countered loftily. “He wanted them delayed so they couldn’t make it in time and Mr. Potter was dealt with once and for all, so I did as he instructed me.”

“But Fudge never told you to delay the letters, now did he?” Bones continued with the persistence of a terrier after a rat.

“He couldn’t,” Umbridge countered. “There were several other people in the office when he gave me the letter to have copied and sent out. I knew what he wanted to happen by the emphasis he placed on their names and the fact he mentioned how bad it would be for Mr. Potter if they failed to make it to the hearing.”

“But yet someone else would take those instructions as meaning send these letters out fast as possible” Bones pointed out.

“They might have,” Umbridge conceded, “If they hadn’t known how determined the Minister was to find some way to have Mr. Potter expelled from Hogwarts so that he would be unable to practice magic again and would be consigned to the muggle world forever.”

"And how did you know Fudge wanted Potter expelled from Hogwarts? Did he say he wanted that at any time?" Bones couldn't believe what she was hearing. It was the truth. The spells on the High Council chambers insured that.

Trying to sound as if she had been in the Minister's personal confidence, Umbridge stated, "We had had many discussions over the summer about trying to find a way to deal with the Potter situation and his claims that the Dark Lord was back. The Minister wanted him dealt with so he wouldn't destabilise the magical world with what at the time we thought were phoney claims of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named's return. Those conversations did include trying to find some way to remove him... without killing him."

"But did at any time did Fudge say that he wanted Harry Potter expelled?" Bones persisted.

"He said he wanted him removed from Hogwarts." Umbridge repeated. "And short of Mr. Potter voluntarily removing himself and going to another magic school, the only other way was expulsion, given the Minister didn't want a hero of the wizarding world killed, because he was currently a misguided tool of Albus Dumbledore's."

"So Fudge wanted Potter removed from Hogwarts perhaps for his own protection considering the dangers the school seem to have recently been experiencing. Or perhaps Fudge wished to place the young Lord somewhere far away from what he viewed as the Headmaster's dangerous... influence." Bones knew she was reaching now.

Umbridge shook her head. "He never said anything like that. He just kept repeating Potter needed to be dealt with."

"And that was why you sent Dementors after him wasn't it?" Bones reminded her. "Interpreting the Minister's comments as orders again."

"But it was what he wanted," Umbridge countered. "The Minister wanted Potter dealt with but not dead. Someone who is Kissed is still alive."

Bones stared at the woman stunned into disbelief at her reasoning. There was nothing she could say. Clearly the woman was deluded. The question was would her delusions be an enough of an extenuating circumstance to get the charge of abuse of power slightly reduced.

“Miss Umbridge, did Minister Fudge tell you why he suddenly decided to change the time of the hearing?” Dantes asked. “From what I understand a hearing time is set up several weeks beforehand and usually if it has to be changed all the main participants are consulted to set up the new hearing time. Once that is done then the remaining participants are notified as well. That means everyone should have been notified at least several days before, not less than twenty-four hours before. Didn’t it strike you as rather unusual to change a hearing time at what is essentially the last minute like that?”

“It has been known to happen before.” Umbridge then explained, “That a hearing time was changed at the last minute, I mean. All the Minister told me regarding the sudden change was that a sudden emergency had come up and he didn’t want to have to rush Mr. Potter’s hearing.”

“I believe we have heard all that we need to on this charge,” Longrim announced.

When none of the other Councillors disagreed, the silencing ward again went up but this time the discussion didn’t take so long.

“Fudge, we find you guilty on the charge of failing to notify all the participants of Lord Potter’s underaged magic trial in a timely manner.” Dantes announced.

Before Fudge could protest that he had, Perrivior held up his hand silencing the protest. “While you stated that you had given the notification letters to Undersecretary Umbridge, it was your duty to make sure all the letters had been sent out and received, given you sent them on such short notice. Less than twenty-four hours is not adequate notice, Minister. I received my notice at six in the morning, not the day before and as a result, I failed to make it to the hearing as well. You changed the time without due thought therefore you and

you alone have the responsibility to make sure everyone gets there on time.”

“It is now time to move on to the most serious charges, those of aiding the Dark Lord intentionally or not; on his second rise to power, by denying his return, slandering Lord Potter and Headmaster Dumbledore who knew the truth, abusing your power once the truth was out because of Lord Potter to insure he didn’t get a fair trial and was condemned to Azkaban.” The expression on Dantes’ face was very grim.

Amelia Bones sat staring at her table for several minutes, not really sure how to go about trying to defend the Minister from this charge. He had after all spent over a year pretending the Dark Lord wasn’t back and trashing Harry Potter and Headmaster Dumbledore’s reputations in the process. “Minister Fudge, when you were told by Lord Potter of He-Who-Must-Not be-Named’s return after the Third Task of the Triwizard Tournament, why didn’t you believe him?”

“There was no proof.” Fudge told her. “The boy was a well-known troublemaker at the school and according to sources a parselmouth as well. It is a well-known fact that Parselmouth’s are Dark and so his claim that Lord Thingy was back wasn’t even worth consideration. He was just trying to disrupt the peace that we in the magical world had been enjoying for the last thirteen years, by spreading vicious rumours to get more attention for himself.”

Bones couldn’t believe it. “You honestly thought a fourteen year old boy could lie well enough to fool Albus Dumbledore?”

“Dumbledore has been claiming for years that the Dark Lord would be back. Of course he wouldn’t look too deeply into the story since it was what he wanted to hear.” Fudge sounded confident.

“Fudge,” Lord Altren couldn’t help sounding disgusted as he said the man’s name. “Did it cross your tiny little mind at any time after you were told that the Dark Lord was back that Lord Potter might be telling the truth?”

“Yes,” Fudge admitted. “But after discussing the matter with someone in the Department of Mysteries, I was certain it wasn’t possible.”

“Madame Bones, when you have time, would you speak to Mr. Croaker who heads the Department of Mysteries and find out who the person Minister Fudge spoke with was.” Lord Altren requested. “Tell him a High Councillor wishes to know and if he won’t tell you have him send this individual to me please, assuming of course that they are still alive.”

“Fudge, I will say this much for you, while you are an idiot, you are undoubtedly a very lucky idiot, given that you managed to stay in power after the Dark Lord’s return was revealed.” Longrim commented. “It is a well-known fact that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named studied the Dark Arts far more in depth than even Grindelwald did. In fact he is known to have performed a number of rituals upon himself with the intent of gaining more power. It doesn’t require a great leap of imagination to suppose that he might have performed a ritual on himself in attempt to gain immortality. After all some of his followers had the largest and oldest collections of Dark Arts books in the world, and what they didn’t have they could locate for him. And intelligent man would have realised the possibility that at some point in the past some Dark Lord or potential Dark Lord had researched a way to come back from the dead, whether they used it or not.”

Fudge’s face reddened, but there was nothing he could say to that.

“Fudge,” Lord Kieran spoke up next. “Even if you didn’t believe Potter or Dumbledore about the Dark Lord’s return, why did you encourage the Daily Prophet among others to print slander about them in an attempt to ruin their reputation?”

“I did no such thing.” Fudge disagreed.

“Oh, then this isn’t your signature on this letter to the owner of the Daily Prophet assuring him that no matter what he printed about Harry Potter and Headmaster Dumbledore, they would not be called to account for it, because the Minister’s office would stand behind them?” Lord Kieran held up a document.

Taking the letter, Lord Perrivior read it over. "If I were the owner of a paper, I would assume from this document, you were giving me carte blanche to say whatever I wanted to about them, even the wildest most unsubstantiated rumour and that I would never have to face any consequences. Why would you be that foolish, Fudge?"

"It wasn't foolish." Fudge defended his actions. "Minister's before me have used the same tactic, even the muggle Prime Minister has been known to use the press to discredit someone so they aren't a threat to the security of the nation."

"But they have never given the press carte blanche to print lies before." Altren countered. "Previous Minister's both magical and muggle would have the press print facts slanted a certain way but they were still true facts. The Daily Prophet printed things that couldn't be proven, in other words they printed lies...at your instigation. Why would you condone this?"

"For the good of the magical world." Fudge said pompously. "At the time I thought they were spreading their lies about He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named being back. Dumbledore told the students at the leaving feast, even though I had ordered him not to. They had to be stopped before they threw the wizarding world into a panic."

"But you soon realised they weren't spreading lies didn't you? You had Ministry personnel covering up magical attacks on the families of muggle-born students and the disappearances of some witches and wizards." Longrim pointed out. "Tell me Fudge are you familiar with the Compact of 1137, one of the few magically binding documents signed by a muggle ruler King Stephen of England and the High Council of the Magical Britain? A compact so secret, not even his brother Henry of Blois the Papal Legate and Archbishop of Canterbury was ever told about it."

"Of course, it's one of the documents that I as Minister had to swear to uphold." Fudge couldn't see the point in the question.

"Did you ever read the Compact, Fudge? Or did you just swear to uphold it and not bother to find out the contents?" Longrim was

beginning to suspect the idiot had no idea he'd violated a magically binding contract.

"Of course I know what it says," Fudge bristled. "King Stephen in return for the neutrality of the magical community of Britain in the civil war between him and his cousin the Empress Maud, ceded permanent control over certain areas of Britain where the magical community was living to us to govern over and rule."

"You are only partially right," Longrim corrected him looking as grim as his name. "It stated that in return for the neutrality of witches and wizards, in the civil war between himself and Empress Maud, that he would set aside certain areas as wholly magical territory that we would govern and rule over, but only so long as we kept the muggle world safe from our kind and alerted the muggle government which was declared in the Compact to be the Monarch or their chosen Deputy to any potential dangers so they could get their people out of the way. You failed to alert the muggle government. I know for a fact through my sources in the muggle government that neither Queen Elizabeth or Prime Minister Tony Blair who would've been considered her Deputy according to the Compact were notified by the Ministry of Magic as to the threat the Dark Lord posed to the muggle world...even after you finally admitted he was back. You as Minister broke the magically binding contract you swore to uphold."

Fudge's face went ash white as he realised what Lord Longrim was implying. If the Queen of muggle Britain or the Prime Minister became aware that the Compact had been broken, then they could demand all the areas that now belonged to magical citizens be returned to them and the Ministry would have no choice but to comply. He would be lucky if he could make it out of Britain alive and he would definitely have a price on his head.

Finally he asked, "Do they know about the Compact? And that it's been breached?"

"Don't you mean broken, Fudge?" Longrim countered icily. "It is unknown if the current muggle Monarch or Prime Minister are aware of the Compact or the fact that it has been broken. Blair and the

Queen certainly know about the magical world since up until you took office, they had regular briefings from the Minister of Magic.”

“But that was during the war with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.” Fudge protested. “They needed to know then. Once he was gone there was no need for them to be apprised of the goings on in the magical world.”

“During the reign of the muggle Queen, Victoria, the Minister of Magic provided the Queen with regular briefings on the state of magical Britain.” Altren told him. “The Queen wished to be kept apprised of every corner of her kingdom, even those parts she would never see. The Minister of Magic at that time agreed with her reasoning and in turn had asked that information on the state of muggle Britain be provided to the Ministry of Magic as well. The exchange of information was so useful it was maintained through your predecessor’s term in office, at least it was until he turned the task over to you since he was trying to deal with the situation the Dark Lord was creating.”

After a moment’s pause where every one could see he was trying to get himself back under control, Altren continued. “Thanks to your arrogance not to mention your wilful blindness we have no way of knowing what the muggle world is now capable of doing to us. We have lost the opportunity to learn about and possibly stop any potential threats to the magical world.”

The silencing ward went up again, but came back down fairly quickly.

“It has been decided by unanimous vote, that the Queen and Prime Minister must be notified of the breach in the Compact.” Dantes stated. “If the people of magical Britain are lucky they will not wish to declare the Compact null and void. We the Lords of the High Council have decided to let them decide your fate, Fudge, regarding the breaching of the Compact. If you are lucky, they may let us impose sentence on you, if not, and they wish to impose their own, your magic will be bound before you are turned over to them. Once this hearing is over, you will be held at Azkaban until they decide. Now there are two more charges to get through, before this hearing is over.”

Fudge stared at them aghast. They were going to turn him over to muggle justice?

Everyone stared in astonishment as Fudge's eyes rolled up in his head and he fainted with only a squeak of sound like a mouse that had been accidentally stepped on.

The ones closest to Fudge and the High Councillors heard Dantes say aloud, "Drama Queen", before he gestured with his wand, causing a bucket to appear and dump a large amount of icy cold water on the Minister.

Fudge sputtered awake and then jumped as a harsh voice ordered. "Get back in your seat Fudge. We don't have time for your theatrics. I for one would like to conclude this matter today...if that is possible."

Fudge reluctantly returned to the chair he had fallen out of.

"Madame Bones, you may continue," Dantes told her.

"Since the Court has concluded that Umbridge was in no way qualified to teach children, let alone teach a class as important as Defence Against the Dark Arts, what made you think she was qualified to, Fudge?" Madame Bones had given up trying to get Fudge off. He'd already been found guilty on too many charges. She was just trying to mitigate the circumstances now.

Fudge's mouth opened and closed several times before saying, "Well she was certainly as qualified as some of Dumbledore's choices over the past seven years. And I knew she would teach the Ministry approved curriculum, not go off on the tangents Dumbledore allowed. I mean he hired a werewolf to teach at the school."

"If you are referring to Lockhart," Kieran spoke up, "then I agree with you she was certainly as qualified to teach as Gilderoy Lockhart. However Remus Lupin, whether he had teaching credentials or not, was far more qualified to teach Defence Against the Dark Arts. We had a look at the curriculum that you had approved to be taught. Do you realize that she was teaching first year material to fifth and

seventh year students with no practical spellwork? How were they supposed to pass their OWLs and NEWTs?"

"But they did pass and with the highest scores ever recorded." Fudge pointed out, puffing himself up slightly, while forgetting to mention that it was all due to Potter's illegal club.

"And I believe that those high scores were due solely to the defence study group that Lord Potter and his year mates put together." Kieran reminded him. "It was not due to anything Umbridge may or may not have done. Why don't you just admit Fudge that you placed your toadie in Hogwarts to try and control the school? I mean it is fairly obvious to us, given that within a few months of her arrival there you appointed her High Inquisitor another job she was not qualified to have as that should be an appointment from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, not the Minister's office. Yet another example of you abusing powers you had no right to."

"The steps I took were for the greater good of the Wizarding world." Fudge declared pompously. "We couldn't afford the instability that people like Dumbledore, Potter and those who believed them could create."

A loud burst of laughter came from where Harry Potter was seated. Dantes pointed his wand in the young Lord's direction. "Lord Potter, you were warned."

Harry held up his hands in surrender and his body continued to shake with laughter. "I'm sorry my lord, but it just slipped out. It was so funny to hear Fudge actually use the same stupid excuse Dumbledore does when he meddles with my life. Not to mention the expression on Dumbledore's face when he heard Fudge use it. I will put up a silencing ward around me so that I won't disturb the proceedings any further."

There was a brief conference between the High Councillors then Dantes said, "That is acceptable. We do not want to hear another sound from you until the hearing is over, or you will be bound and gagged in that chair."

The silencing ward went up around the High Council table again and when it came down, Dantes announced. "Fudge we find you guilty of illegally placing a person not qualified to teach in a school where she was then able to harm many in pursuit of your concept of the Greater Good. It is quite clear that your idea of the Greater Good was not the right thing for the wizarding world or its inhabitants." Dantes looked at Dumbledore and added, "Neither was yours Dumbledore in the case of Lord Potter. I will remind you both of what the road to hell is paved with...good intentions. When you decide you know better than someone else how their life should be lived, you are on the road to becoming the next Dark Lord."

"Now we have reached the last charge; interfering with the process of a trial for Lord Harry Potter by denying the accused all means necessary to prove his guilt or innocence." Pervior told the assembled witnesses. "As Madame Bones was involved in that trial as a member of the Wizengamot, Lord Kieran who is not a member of the Wizengamot will be conducting the interrogation. I will not even though I was not one who sat in judgement on Potter's trial owing to my wife's illness."

"Fudge, why was there no defender for Potter?" Kieran asked what should have been a simple question. "It is the law that the accused must have a defender."

"No one wanted to be associated with defending him." Fudge answered meekly.

"Then there should have been no trial until a defender was found." Kieran countered.

"The public was demanding a trial and there were threatened riots in the streets if the potential Dark Lord was not dealt with." Fudge tried to defend his position.

"So you deliberately violated the law to calm the public?" Kieran wanted clarification of his reasoning.

"Yes!"

Perrivor bowed his head. "Have we fallen so far that the fear of the people is more important than the law of the land? That law was written to protect the people. I wonder if they or you would've been so quick to rush to judgement if it was if it was you or possibly one of them."

Fudge could think of nothing to say in response.

"Very well, you caved to the pressure others put on you instead of doing the right thing." Kieran decided to move on after several more minutes of silence. "Now given that you denied him the right to a defender, why did you also deny him the use of Veritaserum, which would have proven his guilt or innocence beyond a shadow of a doubt?"

"I had been told by a very reliable source that he was immune to it." Fudge repeated what he had been told by Percy Weasley who claimed he had overheard his brother and Potter talking about it. He now realised he had been played for a fool. "It was Percy Weasley. I trusted him and told others on the Wizengamot so we decided not to waste it since it would do no good."

"Fudge, I may not be a Potions Master like Snape over there, but even I know it takes time, a lot of magical power and repeated exposure to it to allow one to build up a resistance to Veritaserum. Potter while he may be powerful now wasn't then and there was no way he could've had repeated exposure to it, not unless they are dosing the students at Hogwarts with it every day." Longrim observed. "With every word you utter, you are proving over and over again, why you should not be let out without a keeper."

"All right you chose to believe Percy Weasley, instead of confirming the information with the Ministry Potions Mistress, so why didn't you use Veritaserum on the witnesses like Percy? After all I doubt he would've been able to resist it. He was your main witness to the events of Neville Longbottom's death and he should've been questioned under Veritaserum at the very least."

"Because both Dumbledore and I believed he was telling the truth." Fudge finally answered. It was the only safety net he had and he took

it. The fact that Dumbledore believed Percy enough to snap Potter's wand before they even left the school grounds had been all the assurance Fudge had needed that Percy could be trusted.

"So you again decided to ignore the law that all witnesses should be questioned under Veritaserum in cases involving murder." Longrim commented. "I don't think we need to hear any more. He was convinced of Potter's guilt before the trial ever began and was determined to do everything possible to make sure he got a conviction."

The silencing ward went back up and stayed up for a very long time. When it finally came down, Dantes looked oddly triumphant. "Fudge, your sentence has been determined, but whether or not it will be carried out will depend on whether or not the muggle government wants exercise its right to punish you for the breach of the Compact or let us administer the punishment."

Perrivor took over at this point. "If the muggle government chooses not to punish you then here is the wizarding world's judgement. You are removed as minister effective immediately, though you will continue to work at the Ministry."

Fudge perked up at this imagining some advisory position where he could move back into the centre of power. Perrivor's next words dashed that dream to smithereens. "From now until you are too old to work, you will be a janitor third class and you will be unable to rise out of that position. Each day when you arrive at work, magic suppression bracelets will be placed on you so that you have no more power than a squib and have to clean things the way a squib would. If nothing else maybe you will learn to think and consider before you do things from now on. You will also be bound with a loyalty oath that what you see, hear, touch, taste, and even smell in the Ministry will not be spoke of to anyone living or dead inside or outside the Ministry."

AN#1: I will leave it up to your imaginations as to whether or not the muggle government chooses to exercise its claim on Fudge. Fudge will be seen and mentioned no more in this story

AN #2: I want to thank Lady Foxfire for her help with the 3 chapters that made up Fudge's trial. Her help was invaluable in bashing Fudge just right. LOL

You Want To Run That By Me Again

Molly Weasley placed her daughter on the stone flagging that she had been standing on when she had been transformed into a dog by Potter. Albus had been nice enough to mark the correct stone so they would make sure she was on the right one at the right time. Stepping back she waited for her daughter to be restored to normal.

Ginny didn't move waiting for the spell Harry had placed on her to reverse itself. After a few moments she felt her bones growing and shifting. It was an uncomfortable and almost painful feeling. She bit her lip to keep from crying out as she once again looked upon a world that had colour in it.

Once she was fully human again, Ginny ignored the older witches and wizards coming toward her and looked around for Harry. She was going to make sure he understood that he was not allowed to do that to her ever again, or she would make their life together hell. She finally spotted him sitting with Luna Lovegood and started to growl as she headed toward the Ravenclaw table to pull her man away from that bitch. Harry was hers and it was time he understood that.

"Miss Weasley," One of the witches got between her and the Ravenclaw table. "You need to come with us please."

Not recognising her as a teacher, Ginny tried to push past the woman. "I've got to talk with Harry first."

"Actually, Miss Weasley, you need to speak with the Headmaster and your Head of House first." A man that Ginny vaguely remembered seeing before the Christmas break took hold of her arm and proceeded to drag her from the Great Hall.

Ginny dug in her heels as the stranger tried to take her from the Great Hall and the man who belonged to her. "Harry! ... Harry! ... Help me!. ... You can't let this man keep us apart!"

Molly opened her mouth to berate Jessup, but Arthur quickly told her. "Not now, Molly, we don't want to make a scene in public."

Molly sniffed and stalked off after Mr. Jessup and her daughter. She was going to give that man a piece of her mind once they were in Dumbledore's office! How dare he haul her daughter off as if she were a common criminal? He should be hauling that Potter boy off, after all he was the one who made her daughter fall in love with him and then treated her like dirt because she made a mistake the previous year.

As the Great Hall doors closed behind the departing group, the level of conversation rose sharply among the students, but it didn't get out of hand since there were still a few teachers there to keep an eye on things.

Most of the older Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff students couldn't help wondering just how much longer it would be before the Headmaster admitted defeat in the matter of Harry Potter. Those who had family, either in the Ministry or on the Wizengamot, knew that a law had been passed the previous summer whose sole purpose was to get Potter back to Hogwarts and force him to interact with his peers.

As far as they could see it had been one of the Headmaster's most spectacular failures. Potter not only refused to have anything to do with his housemates in Gryffindor, he had made it quite clear to anyone willing to look beyond the end of their nose that he was using this time to get his revenge on those he thought had wronged him.

About the only success the Headmaster's plan could claim, was it caused near school unity amongst the Ravensclaws, Hufflepuffs, Slytherins and the first through third year Gryffindors. They all had one goal in mind: Not to do anything that would attract Potter's attention. One Slytherin fourth year had put it best and in a way it mirrored the school motto: It was better not to wake the sleeping dragon.

As they resumed eating the welcome feast, a couple of Hufflepuffs couldn't help wondering why Ginny Weasley would be expecting Harry Potter to come to her aid, given he had made it quite clear he loathed her.

"Enter," Dumbledore's voice called in response to the knock.

Jessup the American inspector sent by the Wizengamot came in followed by one of his fellow inspectors, Molly, Arthur and Ginny Weasley. Dumbledore could tell from the expression on Molly's face that she was barely containing her rage at the treatment of her daughter.

"Ginny, it's good to see you are back to normal." Dumbledore sounded pleased.

"And no sooner was she human again, than this... man," Molly spat unwilling to remain silent any longer, "dragged her up here, before we even had a chance to make sure she was alright after what that brute Potter did to her."

Ginny was not about to let her mother bad mouth Harry. She was the only one with the right to put him in his place. "Mum, Harry is not a brute! He just doesn't understand that we belong together and reacted badly to my trying to protect what we have."

Arthur just shook his head. He knew Ginny was stubborn, like her mother, but this was ridiculous. Harry had made it quite clear he wanted nothing to do with her or any other member of their family. It would take time, but he was certain she would come to realise and accept that fact. "Ginny, we will discuss your relationship with Harry at another time. Right now we have other matters to take care of."

"You can't mean that expulsion business again!" Molly demanded, looking at Jessup who had been the one to bring it up. "You seriously intend to force the Headmaster to expel my daughter, when she isn't the one at fault. If the blasted Potter boy hadn't led her on all these years...."

"Molly, he has no choice." McGonagall interrupted her rant before it could get started. "For whatever reason, Ginny deliberately attacked and nearly killed another student and it wasn't in a duel, which is the only exception allowed. And for that one exception to apply the reason for the duel must be declared in front of a staff member and fought in front of the staff to be legal. Ginny did none of those things and so she must be expelled. Dumbledore was advised, by the Board

of Governors that if he doesn't follow the rules, he will be removed as Headmaster and a new one put in his place." McGonagall held up her hand to silence Molly as she opened her mouth to speak. "And I have already been told the new head of the school won't be me if that happens."

"Headmaster," Ginny spoke up before anyone could ask why McGonagall wouldn't be considered for the post of Headmistress. "May I make a request before you expel me?"

"And what is that my child?" Dumbledore looked at her sadly. This child had had so much promise.

"I would like to spend one final night in Gryffindor Tower, before my wand is snapped. Would that be possible?"

Dumbledore saw no reason not to grant her request and was certain she just wanted to say good-bye to some of her yearmates. A quick glance that the American inspectors showed they were not going to object either. "I see no reason why not, but you will have to leave your wand here with me."

"Albus! How can you think of leaving Ginny without the means to defend herself?" Molly protested. "What if that brute Potter decides to attack her again? She wouldn't be able to stop him."

"Molly, Harry has made it clear that he wants little if any contact with Ginny, I think she will be safe enough this one night in Gryffindor tower." Albus sounded tired.

"Like you've been right about anything concerning that boy since the school year began." Molly crossed her arms and glared at Dumbledore. "You listen to me Dumbledore and listen well. If anything... anything happens to Ginny up in Gryffindor tower tonight and Potter is found to be the cause, you have my word that you are going to pay for it. I don't care how important you seem to think he is to the wizarding world, he is destroying my family. First it was the twins refusing to have anything more to do with us, claiming we turned our backs on a family member, which he most definitely was not. Then Percy is found to be a Death eater because of him. Ron has

lost his prefect status because of that brat and now Ginny is to be expelled.... All because of bloody Potter!"

Ginny sat in her bed in her dorm with the curtains drawn, waiting for her roommates to fall asleep. She felt a little sad that this would be the last time she would be in this dorm or see these girls. They had already started pulling away from her because they knew she was to be expelled and acted as if coming in contact with her would lead to them being expelled too.

Ginny smiled to herself. She would have the last laugh though. Thanks to the potion in her hand she would be Mrs. Harry Potter by the summer. She was certain of it. Harry wouldn't want his child to grow up without a mother or a father. He would do the right thing and marry her and then Ginny would be able to show him just how much she loved him. Once he was hers she would make sure he never looked at another female. There would be no more Luna Lovegoods to trouble their life, because once she and Harry were together, he would realise just how happy he was to be with her and how happy she could make him.

The girls in the Gryffindor sixth year dorm woke early. They wanted to be out of the dorm before Ginny Weasley woke. While they liked her, they didn't want to be around when she was expelled. Seeing a witch's wand snapped was not a pleasant experience and it was one they didn't want to see.

They were surprised when they got down to the common room to find Ginny asleep, her nightclothes messed up and a silly smile on her sleeping face.

"Who's gonna wake her?" Jessie McGuire a muggle-born witch asked. "She has to be in the Headmaster's office before breakfast."

The girls looked back and forth at each other, none of them willing to brave Ginny's well-known temper, until Marion Achtland huffed and grabbed hold of Ginny's shoulder and shook it hard.

"You need to wake up Ginny." Marion called. "You have to see the Headmaster, remember?"

Ginny yawned and stretched like a cat, her face never losing its smile.

“Why did you go to sleep down here when you could’ve slept in your bed?” Jessie asked. “I mean that couch can’t have been very comfortable to sleep on.”

“Oh,” Ginny’s smile deepened and she blushed as she headed up the stairs. “Considering what happened to me last night on that couch, it felt like I was floating on air.”

“Skank,” Jessie McGuire sniffed once Ginny was out of hearing range.

The other girls just shrugged.

“I wonder who she screwed?” Marion Achtlund commented as they headed for the portrait hole.

“Clearly someone with no taste.” Andrea Mitchell told them. “She’s been had by nearly every boy she could get at. I still can’t believe her parents and brother think she’s a virgin.”

“Yea,” Jessie agreed, “and that started when Potter was sent to Azkaban. Didn’t think she was up to her old tricks anymore though, given she wanted to get him back.”

“Well, given Potter made it very clear he wanted nothing to do with her, maybe she decided to get some, one last time, before she’s kicked out of school.” Andrea suggested.

“I wonder who the unfortunate wizard was?” Marion put in.

The girls fell silent as they joined others heading for the Great Hall for breakfast.

Jessup watched Ginny Weasley and her parents very carefully as her wand was snapped by Headmaster Dumbledore. His instincts were telling him that something was wrong. She was far too calm for someone who was being expelled from one of the biggest European schools.

"I wonder if they gave Miss Weasley a calming draught before bringing her up here." Jessup whispered to Angela Bellmont, one of his fellow inspectors.

"Why?" She whispered back.

"Her reaction to being expelled is all wrong." Jessup told her. "I've seen kids expelled at some of the magical schools in the US Confederation and the student being expelled is very emotional about having their wand snapped since it is their primary means of doing magic."

"Unless they are capable of doing magic without a wand such as Wiccan, Voodoo, Shamanistic magic such as practiced by the Native Americans and let us not forget techno-pagans who are proving quire successful at mixing technology with magic." Angela reminded him. "If an expelled student was capable of working that kind of magic before then they still should be able to, given it doesn't require a wand. I don't recall ever hearing of any of the magic users in the European magical world, using that style of magic though."

Jessup nodded, conceding that point. "That's true. Those who can work any type of wandless magic are few and far between, but even for them there is some kind of reaction to their wand being snapped. She didn't react at all to her wand being snapped as if it didn't matter to her. So, unless Miss Weasley was given a calming potion prior to being brought up here to keep her from getting hysterical, I think she is planning something."

Angela Bellmont studied the girl intently. Adam was right. The girl was too calm and Angela thought she detected an air of smug satisfaction about her that didn't bode well for someone. "I think we should advise Madame Bones who heads the Aurors Department about our suspicions. I'm fairly certain she won't have any problems arranging for someone to keep an eye on Miss Weasley, given she was the child who was possessed by Voldemort's diary in her first year here. There is no telling how much of what he knew she retained and I am certain that Madame Bones is no more eager than we are to

have a Dark Lady make a bid for power given they just got rid of their most recent Dark Lord.”

“Agreed. We’ll let her know during our meeting at the end of the week.” Jessup turned his attention back to the room and saw the Weasley’s were leaving.

Dumbledore was looking very old and solemn as he returned to the seat behind the desk. “Of all the duties I have as Headmaster, that is the one I like the least. Snapping a student’s wand and expelling them makes me feel as if we at Hogwarts somehow failed them.”

“Understandable,” Jessup commiserated with the man, “but ultimately each of us is responsible for our own actions.”

“True,” Dumbledore agreed, “but I feel that people should be given a second chance to correct their mistakes or they never learn whether they be young or old. I intended to try and correct the mistakes I made with Mr. Potter, but I seem to be causing almost as much harm as I do good with my attempt to make amends.”

“Headmaster, our inspection is completed and we will be turning our report into the Department of Magical Education before the end of the day.” Jessup told him.

“Might I ask what you intend to tell them?” Dumbledore was hoping for some clue as to what they had found. He was fairly certain they were going to recommend that Binns be replaced, but he was not sure about any of the others.

“I’m sorry Headmaster, but that report is confidential until it is presented to the Head of the Department of Magical Education.” Jessup told him.

Dumbledore had to strongly resist the temptation to use Legilimency to try and get some advance information. He needed to know what they were going to be doing to his school. He knew from his conversations with Jessup and his fellow inspectors that they were very capable of resisting any attempts to get an idea of what they were up to and it irritated him no end.

"It has been a pleasure to meet you Headmaster." Jessup called as he and his companion headed for the door

The Head of the Department of Magical Education Allyn Gywr eyed the very thick report that had been placed on his desk by the head of the American inspection team with a sigh. "Could you give me the highlights so I know what I am going to be facing with Dumbledore. He is going to fight tooth and nail over this report."

"The school itself is sound though a number of the courses being taught could use some major updating. European magical schools are way behind the rest of the world in certain types of magic that are being taught and I'm not just comparing them to the schools in the US Confederation either. Even the Asian and South American schools are more up to date than their European counterparts." Jessup said from his seat on the other side of the desk. "We have recommended the replacement of the History of Magic teacher because the only history being taught by him is the Goblin Rebellions and the students at Hogwarts need to learn the true history of the magical world... the whole magical world. We also recommend the replacement of the Divination teacher since she is not correctly teaching the aspects that make up divination. She seems far more content with making doom and gloom prophecies and the only students who seem to receive good grades are the ones who follow her mantra of: my world is going to be a complete and unmitigated disaster. We also would like to suggest that the Care of Magical Creatures class be broken up into two levels."

"Why two levels?" Mr. Gywr asked. He would have thought that they would've have recommended replacing Hagrid completely.

"Professor Hagrid is a very competent teacher when it comes to the large and dangerous creatures, but he is not teaching to the level of his students. The creatures he is teaching about are fine for say sixth and seventh year students, but third through fifth year students in order to acquire a love for the magical creatures that share our world, should be started off with safer creatures and a teacher who can teach them at their level of magical competence in case something does go wrong." Jessup told him. "We also recommend that the

Muggle studies teacher be replaced with an actual muggle-born and not a pureblood who is working with information that is at least sixty years out of date.”

“Anything else?” Mr. Gwyr had a feeling he hadn’t heard the worst yet and there had to be more given the size of the report.

“Yes,” Jessup looked very serious. “We strongly recommend that the Heads of the four houses no longer be teachers, but instead former students of at least thirty years of age, with skills at handling children from all walks of life be they muggle or magical. We are also recommending that they serve no more than five or ten years before being replaced. Also we recommend that the houses be mixed together more in the classes and that the classes themselves be broken up based on level of skill or knowledge at each year level.”

“Why? The current system has worked just fine.” Gwyr couldn’t see why they wanted to overturn the house system.

“Actually it has not.” Jessup disagreed. “We have ample evidence that because the teachers also have teaching duties and in some cases because they have other duties in addition to teaching, like Professor McGonagall, they are unable to give the students in their houses the attention they need. For example did you know that during her first five years in Ravenclaw house that Luna Lovegood’s possessions were constantly broken into and damaged? Professor Flitwick either was never informed, or was unable to devote the time needed to stop the harassment by a group of Miss Lovegood’s own housemates who according to the speech given at each sorting were supposed to be her family when she was away from home. May the deity help anyone with a family like that at home. Did you also know that because of her numerous duties, Professor McGonagall was unable to spend adequate time with the students in her House? During Miss Ginny Weasley’s first year, she failed to notice any changes in the girl’s behaviour? While it may not have changed the outcome any, it is our contention that if each House had had a full time head and not just a part time one, they might have been able to pick up on the signs of possession that Miss Weasley must have shown or at least a change in personality that would indicate that something was wrong. Also according to Mr. Potter, when he tried to

tell Professor McGonagall about Miss Umbridge using a restricted artefact on him in detention, he was told to keep his head down and avoid drawing attention to himself and that if he wasn't able to do that he would just have to accept the detentions."

Gwyr stared at the inspector in disbelief. He wouldn't have thought he would ever hear such things reported about Minerva McGonagall. She had always seemed so caring and concerned about the members of her house to him "What are you proposing?"

"As I said before, that the teachers will no longer be Heads of House and that a former student be hired to fulfil that role for each House. Their sole duty will be to be there for the students in their House's needs whether it be as a sounding board because they are homesick, or to help with homework or a problem." Jessup told him. "As for the recommendation about the classes, we think it would be better if all four houses have classes together at each year level rather than just the current system of placing two houses together. Also to avoid the problem of having the classes be too large for the teacher to handle we suggest that the classes be broken up based on skill level or knowledge of the children being taught. This will insure that children who can learn the material more quickly aren't held back and those who maybe need extra help in certain subjects can get that help without being made to feel as though they are worthless or stupid."

On January 7th, as the students were finishing up breakfast in the Great Hall, some of them noticed a stranger dressed in muggle clothes quietly entering the Great Hall and nudged their friends to alert them to his presence. These days at Hogwarts, strangers wither meant something very bad or very good was about to happen. They just didn't know what this stranger was going to bring with him.

The wizard, at least they assumed he was a wizard in spite of his muggle attire given he had gotten into Hogwarts, had an aura of power around him and that combined with the way he moved made the students think of Mad-Eye Moody though a younger one with a much slenderer build and shoulder length brown hair. He also seemed to be looking for someone. After a few moments it was apparent that he found the one he was seeking as he headed toward

the end of the Ravenclaw table where Harry Potter was again seated next to Luna Lovegood.

Those Ravenclaws closest to the pair were surprised to see Potter smile when this strange wizard greeted him. "Hello Harry."

"Liam, this is a surprise." Potter shook the other wizard's hand. "What are you doing here?"

"It's been a week since the end of Fudge's trial." Dantes reminded him.

"Oh yea, I forgot." Potter nodded. "The duel with Mrs. Weasley is supposed to be today."

"You're still going to be my second aren't you?" Dantes wanted to know.

"Of course." Potter assured him. "Wild Hippogriffs couldn't stop me."

The name Liam sounded familiar and it took the eavesdropping Ravenclaws a few minutes to place make the connection with the articles they'd been reading over the past few weeks. Liam Dantes! Despite his attire of muggle jeans and shirt, this was the Heir to the Ravenclaw line! This man standing near their table was the Heir of their Founder!

Word quickly spread down the table, but before one of the seventh year prefects could greet the Ravenclaw heir, Dumbledore walked up to him. "Lord Ravenclaw, it is a pleasure to see you again. If you will join me in my office we can have our discussion in private."

"Headmaster Dumbledore," Dantes countered dryly, "I did not come to meet with you. I have an honour duel today if you will recall with Molly Prewitt Weasley and it is to be fought here in the Great Hall at 10am."

"Lord Ravenclaw," Dumbledore spoke up trying to be conciliatory. "A duel with Mrs. Weasley will solve nothing and only create more ill

feelings between you. One of you should be the better person and apologise and call off this duel.”

“Then I suggest you speak to the one who made the challenge and not me.” Dantes countered. “If she wishes to retract her challenge, I will have no problem with that, but I will not apologise for what I said regarding her daughter or her family since it is most likely true.”

“Lord Ravenclaw by your own admission, you are duelling master, which puts Mrs. Weasley at a severe disadvantage.” Dumbledore persisted.

“Which is why I insisted that this duel be a paintball duel.” Dantes reminded him.

Aware of the eavesdropping students and not wanting to give them any more ammunition, Dumbledore used the only power he had as Headmaster over a Founder’s heir and even then it wasn’t absolute. “Lord Ravenclaw, as Headmaster, I must ask that you come to my office so that we can discuss this matter among others in privacy.”

Dantes nodded. “Very well Headmaster, I will come to your office, but do not think you will change my mind. The mind that must be changed is Molly Weasley’s.”

“Lord Ravenclaw, why are you so willing to duel a woman who is nowhere near your equal? You do realise it makes you look like a bully.” Dumbledore pointed out once they were in his office.

“I am not the one who offered the challenge to a duel.” Dantes reminded him. “I am not the one who wanted to be magically bound appear and fight. Molly Weasley was the one who issued the challenge and magically bound us both to this duel. She either will have to see it through or if she does withdraw or fail to show up, then she will forfeit her honour.”

“But we are not talking about a magically binding contract.” Dumbledore persisted. “You do not have to duel Mrs. Weasley.”

“Actually we are. A challenge to a duel that is made with every intention of it being carried out by the offering party and accepted by the party it was offered to is in fact every bit as binding as the contracts for the Triwizard Tournament, except in this case instead of a person’s magic being lost, it’s their honour that is.” Dantes pulled out his watch and looked at it. “And Molly Weasley has thirty minutes to appear or forfeit the duel and her precious honour.”

“But Molly wasn’t thinking clearly when she made that challenge. You had just insulted her daughter and her families honour.” Dumbles reminded him.

Dantes looked him straight in the eye, “If you want this duel stopped, you are talking to the wrong person. You need to be talking with Mrs. Weasley. I don’t know why you are in such a hurry to stop it. No one is going to get hurt. It is simply a paintball duel.”

“But it may not stay that way.” Dumbledore reminded him.

“It will on my part, unless Mrs. Weasley chooses to sacrifice her honour to win the duel.” Dantes countered.

As Dumbledore made a firecall to the Weasley’s home, Dantes walked over to the phoenix perch and whispered, “Hello Fawkes.”

Fawkes stared into the hazel eyes for a moment and then took a quick look at his bonded before stretching out his head and rubbing it against the man’s hand.

“You like me now,” Dantes commented in a very low voice, “but will you like me at the end of the year when I give the old fool what he richly deserves?”

Fawkes gave him a reproachful look.

“Oh don’t worry, he’s not going to be dead, but he’s not going to be too happy either.” Dantes warned him. “He is going to pay for all the crimes he’s committed in his quest for the so-called Greater Good.”

Fawkes gave him a soulful look, but Dantes shook his head. "Not even you can change my mind, Fawkes. He has been meddling too long and destroyed too many lives. It ends now, before he can cause more harm. Now I have a question for you. Why do you stay with him, Fawkes? You know he is no longer Light, so why stay."

Fawkes whistled a mournful note.

"So you care about the meddling old coot," Dantes concluded, "and you think you can turn him back toward the Light?"

Fawkes nodded.

"Hate to tell you this, Fawkes, but I think it's too late for him." Dantes told the phoenix softly. "All you are doing with your presence at his side is fooling people into thinking he's still on the side of Light. They don't realise he is Grey and a Dark Grey at that. If he'd done half the things he's done to me to Neville or say even Malfoy someone would be screaming their bloody heads off, if not burning him at the stake, but because I have no one to speak up for me, he gets away with everything he's ever done to me, because you are still here. You may not want to believe me, but just think about it."

Dumbledore pulled his head out of the fire and looked around for Dantes only to seeing him standing near Fawkes petting the phoenix. Dumbledore was glad to see that, it meant that the man was a good person. He'd always found Fawkes to be an excellent judge of character.

"Molly is on her way." Dumbledore announced, getting to his feet.

"So you couldn't convince her to call off the duel either." Dantes concluded.

"Regrettably no," Dumbledore told him. "She has get hold of Arthur since he is her second, but they should be here in time. Since I am not able to change either of your minds there is another matter I would like to discuss with you that concerns Hogwarts itself."

Molly and Arthur Weasley stared around the Great Hall in surprise. The tables and benches were gone. Instead there were wooden barriers scattered around the room.

"You are a little late, Mrs. Weasley." Dantes observed. "I was beginning to wonder if you had changed your mind and decided to sacrifice your honour."

"Not on your life!" Molly hissed.

"Fortunately for me, my life is not on the line and neither is yours, since this is a paintball duel." Dantes pulled a shrunken case out of a pouch at his waist and enlarged it. Opening it, he pulled several items out and handed them to Molly. "You will need these."

Molly looked at the clear, over large things that looked like glasses, a half mask looking thing that looked like it was to be worn on the lower half of someone's face and something wooden that she couldn't figure out. "What are these?"

"These," Dantes tapped the clear large glasses, "are to protect your eyes. They have been treated with an Impervius charm so that the paint won't stick to them so that you will always be able to see. The mask is to be worn so you don't accidentally swallow or breathe in the paint. And last but not least," he slid his wand into the groove on the top of the wooden thing, "this is similar to the muggle pistols used in muggle paintball tournaments. It links to the core of your wand and allows you to aim and fire the orbis pigmento spell that produces the balls of coloured paint."

"You have got to be kidding!" Molly stared at the things in disgust. "We are supposed to be fighting a proper duel, not a children's game. I didn't come here to play some game with you. I came here for a duel to defend my family's honour."

"Actually madam, children in the muggle world and even in the parts of the magical world where this is paintball is used as a form of training and entertainment do not take part in the tournaments, because the paintballs themselves can cause bruising when they make contact. It is primarily adults and older teens that engage in this

sport. And as I also told you, madam, unless you want to wind up severely injured or dead, you will stop disputing the original terms agreed to by your second. I have no problem fighting a real duel, but be warned, I will fight to win if that is the case and to me winning will be you dead or permanently incapacitated. I haven't lost a duel yet and you won't be my first." Dantes' expressionless face convinced Molly that he was deadly serious.

"How we know which of us won the duel if we simply use paintballs?" Molly wanted to know. "In a normal duel, the winner is clear because one of the duellists is down and unable to continue duelling."

"That is quite simple, madam," Dantes assured her. "In muggle paintball tournaments and some of the magical ones I have seen and participated in, they have a time limit usually of about thirty minutes to an hour. The ones covered with the most paint are the losers and that is the method we will use. If you are agreeable our duel will last thirty minutes and then we will see which of us is the loser."

"Very well," Molly huffed.

Dantes showed her how to put on the glasses and mask that was to protect the lower half of her face. He also showed her how to make sure her wand was properly slotted in the strange pistol shaped handle so that it would still fire spells.

"Now madam, since you are unfamiliar with the spell we will be using and the means by which it is fired, you may have twenty minutes to practice it." Dantes told her. "The spell is quite simple, a first year could do it. Simply aim at one of the wooden barriers and say *orbis pigmento* while thinking of the colour you would like the ball of paint to be. Once you can fire it well, we will have our duel."

The three men watched from near the wall as Molly Weasley practised the spell and learned to move around the barriers and obstacles.

"Your wife should've worn different clothes, Mr. Weasley." Dantes observed as she moved around the room. "Her mobility is going to be

affected by that skirt of hers, but unless she is good at transfiguration, it is too late for her to change into a pair of pants now.”

Arthur had to agree with that assessment, but simply said, “Molly never wears pants. She says it's not proper for a lady to wear men's clothes.”

“She may regret that choice before this is over. I see she has also found out that the pistol grip will allow her to fire other spells if needed.” Dantes commented, as a red bolt of spell energy hit the barrier Molly was firing at. “The designers left it that way, since some tournaments are fought in the woods where magical creatures among others are roaming about and they didn't want to take away a person's ability to defend themselves, by having to waste time removing their wand from the pistol grip.”

As Molly fired several more standard spells at the barrier, Dantes shouted. “Since you now seem to have the paint spell down practise time is up, madam.”

Arthur looked around the room and realised that someone was missing. “We need a referee to start and oversee the duel.”

“Who would you suggest?” Harry asked.

“Either Dumbledore or Flitwick,” Arthur suggested. “Both of them are considered expert duellers, though Flitwick has a Mastery in Duelling along with his Charms mastery.”

“If he is available, I would prefer this Flitwick.” Dantes named his choice. “Can he be gotten here quickly?”

“He teaches here.” Harry told him.

“I would prefer the Headmaster to start the duel.” Molly countered.

“I think Flitwick has seventh year Gryffindors right about now,” Arthur commented. “Ron and Hermione are both in his class so I know the schedule.”

Dantes shrugged, "then let it be Dumbledore."

"Tibby," Arthur called one of the Hogwarts house elves.

When the house elf appeared Arthur made his request and the elf disappeared with a pop. It reappeared a few minutes later and whispered something to Arthur. Arthur nodded his thanks.

"Dumbledore will be down in a few minutes." Arthur announced.

Once Dumbledore arrived, Dantes cast a spell to create a visible stopwatch and said, "The clock will start the moment Dumbledore begins the duel and when the alarm sounds the duel is ended, understood, Mrs. Weasley?"

She nodded her understanding.

Dantes glanced at the Headmaster, "Are you going to close the doors to give us some privacy, Dumbledore?"

"No, There is no reason too." Dumbledore told him.

"Very well," Dantes aimed his ash grey wand at the doorway and made an arcing gesture. A bolt of white energy hit the keystone of the doorway arch and a barrier shimmered into being. "That will ensure that no students can enter the Great Hall while the duel is in progress. For their own safety and ours."

Dumbledore nodded, pleased that the man at least cared about the students who went to his ancestor's school. "If you are both ready?"

Dantes nodded.

Molly said, "Lets get this over with."

"Bow," Dumbledore requested and when they had done so, he counted, "Three... two... one."

Both duellists immediately shouted, "orbis pigmento" before dodging for the nearest barricade.

The paint balls of red and green impacted on the shields that Dumbledore had placed a few inches from the walls of the Great Hall to protect them from paint splatters. A student passing by the Great Hall heard the shouting and stopped to watch then realised he was watching a very unusual duel and hurried to get a few of his friends so they could see this as well.

Molly and Dantes darted around firing paint ball spells at each other. Some of them made contact, but not all. The floor and barriers were soon covered in paint.

Molly kept an eye on the clock Dantes had thoughtfully provided, and waited for her chance. She would only get one shot at taking down this man who insulted her honour.

As the time started to run out and Molly was well covered in paint, she saw her chance. Pointing her wand at Dantes, she whispered, "Stupify."

The beam of red light struck Dantes and he collapsed. Harry seeing the deliberate attack by Mrs Weasley, pointed his staff in her direction and shouted, "Incarecerous!"

Ropes wrapped themselves tightly around Molly before anyone else in the room had a chance to react, sending her crashing to the ground.

"Your wife has forfeited her honour, by breaking the terms of the duel." Harry announced.

"I did not!" Molly retorted as Arthur went over to free her. "I never agreed to them! I fought a proper duel and took down my opponent!"

Dumbledore looked at Molly surprised. He never would've expected her to cheat. "Molly, I am afraid that I must agree with Mr. Potter. Having heard the terms that were stated, when you challenged Lord Ravenclaw during Fudge's trial before the High Council and the fact that you did not disagree with them at that time, you were bound to honour them or tell him before the duel began that you would not."

Arthur looked at his wife in surprise, his eyes wide as if he was seeing her for the first time. "Molly," he hissed, "if you were not going to accept the terms you should have said so before the duel started. Not only have you have betrayed the honour of the Prewitts, but the Weasleys as well. I agreed to the terms on your behalf as was proper and never once did you say that you would not abide by them." Arthur shook his head as if to wipe the memory of what his wife had done from his mind. "I am ashamed of you, Molly. Today you showed me that you do not believe in honour, something that we taught our children was one of the most important things they had. I don't know how you will be able to face our children when they learn what you have done. Did you even think of how this will affect them? How people will react to them when they learn who their mother is and what she has done. You have also dragged us even further than ever from any chance of reconciliation with Harry, given he too has seen that you are without honour."

"You're a fool Arthur if you think we have a chance at reconciling with that boy." Molly spat as she struggled with the ropes binding her. "He's a lost cause and in your heart you know it. The only question remaining is how much damage is he going to do before you admit it to yourself."

Dumbledore shook his head sadly. He never thought he would see Molly Weasley sink so low as to violate the terms of a duel. He went over and pointed his wand at Dantes, "Enervate."

Dantes looked up in confusion. "What happened?"

With a thoughtful look on his face, Dumbledore opened his mouth to reply but before he could say anything Harry chimed in, "Mrs. Weasley cheated. She used a Stupify spell on you to knock you out."

Sitting up Dantes looked over at Molly Weasley not with a hateful or angry expression but with an expression that proclaimed louder than words that he knew she was a woman with no honour and that her actions had just confirmed it.

Getting to his feet Dantes walked over to where Molly had been brought to her feet by her husband, still bound by the ropes Harry had placed there.

Removing his wand from the pistol grip he pointed it at her. "Be grateful, madam," Dantes said in calm almost deadly tone of voice, "that I do not attack those unable to retaliate. You have proven you and your family are without honour. By violating the terms of the duel, you have forfeited what little honour you ever held. From this day forward, your dishonour will be plain for all to see when they look at you."

A bolt of grey light left Dantes wand and hit Molly. The ropes binding her vanished, but as both Arthur and Dumbledore watched the word: dishonoured was written across her forehead in red letters.

In the silence that had fallen on the Great Hall after Dantes' spell hit Molly, they all heard the sound of voices near the door way and that was quickly followed by scurrying feet. Dumbledore looked up to see children disappearing from the Great Hall entry way.

"Told you, you should have closed the doors." Dantes commented to Dumbledore as he gestured at the keystone to remove the barrier. "Word of Molly Weasley's dishonour will spread far and wide before you can stop it."

"And unfortunately added to what Ginny has already done by attacking Luna," Harry put in. "The Weasley name may be only a little higher on the scale than the Malfoy name, by the time this makes the rounds."

They were just finishing up the final steps on their potions when there was a knock on the lab door. When it opened, Terry Boot stuck his head inside and said quietly, "Professor Wilmot, the Headmaster would like to see Harry Potter as soon as possible."

Wilmot nodded, then she told Harry, "Mr. Potter, since class is almost over, I will grade your potion on what has been done up to this point. If you would like to try and get the grade for the completed potion, you can come back to redo the potion after classes today."

“Yes Professor,” Harry turned off the fire under his cauldron and then gathered up his equipment and went to join Boot who was waiting by the door.

“What did you do to upset Dumbledore now, Harry?” Boot inquired. It was well known that these days the only time the Headmaster asked to see Harry was when he had done something to annoy him.

Harry shrugged. “I have no idea. I haven’t done anything that could even remotely be considered a problem since the duel between Mrs. Weasley and Lord Ravenclaw and that was several months ago. And that would only be a problem if you were a Weasley.”

Boot nodded in agreement with that last statement. Ron Weasley had been avoiding Harry like he had the plague since the duel where his mother dishonoured herself and Gryffindor House by breaking the agreed upon rules of a duel. What no one had been able to figure out was why she had done it. That was a tactic the Slytherins would’ve used not someone from Gryffindor. Surely beating Dantes wasn’t worth the loss of someone’s personal honour.

When they arrived at the gargoyle guarding the Headmaster’s office, Boot said, “Pepper imps.”

The gargoyle slid aside and Terry told Harry, “Go on up, he’s waiting for you.”

Harry shrugged and headed up the stairs, wondering what the meddling old coot had in mind now.

As soon as Harry had entered the office, he was knocked into the nearest wall by a strong slap to the side of his face.

“How dare you take advantage of my daughter like that,” Harry heard a voice he recognized as Molly Weasley’s yelling at him. “Haven’t you done enough damage to my family? Percy is in Azkaban because of you. The twins won’t speak to or even see us, because of you. And now you have to take my baby girl’s innocence and get her pregnant. We should have left you in Azkaban.”

Harry managed to get out of the way of the woman's flailing arm, long enough to cast, "petrificous totalis."

As he looked around the Headmaster's office, he saw Arthur standing off to one side of Molly his wand out as if he were in the process of trying to cast a spell. Ginny was standing near Fawkes' perch a confident smile on her face as she looked at him.

"Now that the shrew has been silenced at least for now, would someone care to tell me just what the hell she was screaming at me about?" Harry asked taking a seat as far away from the petrified Mrs. Weasley as it was possible to get in the little office.

Unable to contain the news she had for one moment longer, Ginny said. "I'm going to have your baby!"

Harry shook his head certain that there was a problem with his hearing. "You want to run that by me one more time, cause I thought I heard Miss Weasel say she was going to have my baby."

AN: orbis pigmento – ball paint

(AN: The borderline dark potion Ginny used acts like a pseudo-polyjuice potion. With hair from the intended father it allows a woman to get pregnant without intercourse. Ginny got the knowledge about this potion during her first year from Tom and had Dung purchase the potion. She slept with no one, but knowing how quickly the wizarding world was to leap to the incorrect conclusion gave the impression that she did. She was certain that once Harry was named as the Father everyone would believe her and she would have her man because he would do the right thing and marry her. Can we say serious mental problems here!!!!!! 10 points to anyone old enough to remember where the title of this chapter comes from and correctly identify it.)

Surprise! Surprise! Surprise!

“That is indeed what Miss Weasley did say, Mr. Potter.” The look Dumbledore gave Harry made it clear that he was disappointed in Harry’s actions.

“Save that look for someone who cares, Dumbledore.” Harry told him dryly. “Once again I am judged and found guilty of something I didn’t do, solely on the word of a Weasley. Given her previous actions, I’m surprised you are willing to believe her. I wouldn’t believe her if she said it was raining and it really was.”

“Madame Pomfrey had confirmed it this morning.” Arthur Weasley told him stiffly as if Harry had just insulted his honour. “Ginny is about four months pregnant and while she named you as the father, I wanted to be certain, given what you said previously regarding your feelings for her. At my request Madame Pomfrey performed a magical paternity test and it confirmed you are the father.”

Ginny smiled smugly at Harry. “I told you on our last night together at Hogwarts that nothing would keep us apart. I’m carrying your child. What further proof do you need of my love for you? It’s time you accept that we were meant to be a family. You are my soulmate Harry.”

Harry gave Ginny a long considering look before turning his attention back to Arthur. “While I have a good idea of the mechanics involved in getting a woman pregnant thanks to a few talks with Sirius over the

Christmas break during my fifth year, I am forced to admit I have never had a chance to practise the techniques he recommended. Given that rather embarrassing fact, I can't help but wonder how your daughter is pregnant by me. I can only think of one case in the whole of human history where a woman got pregnant without a man being directly involved, but I wouldn't have thought Gin-Gin would fit the required criteria for immaculate conception. I know I certainly don't."

"Harry, you should be overjoyed by the fact that you are going to be a father." Ginny said as if she was talking to a slow child. "You will see once we are married, you will finally have the family you have always wanted. I know you will be a good father to our child." Ginny looked down at her slightly swollen belly and gently rubbed it. "Yes your daddy will be very good daddy."

"I'd go back to Azkaban first... with the Dementors." Harry muttered.

"Mr. Potter, there is no call to insult Miss Weasley." Dumbledore having spent more time interacting with the muggle world than most wizards understood the reference to immaculate conception from one of their major religions and figured out that Harry apparently was not going to do the right thing by the girl he got pregnant. He never would've thought that a Potter would shirk his responsibilities. He could also see that Arthur hadn't understood the implied reference and was grateful for that. The last thing he needed or wanted was another formal duel at Hogwarts.

"I don't consider the truth to be an insult." Harry countered.

Ginny was not pleased to hear this. Why was her Harry still trying to fight against Fate? He was hers and nothing would take him away from her. She had known that even before he saved her from the basilisk. Harry was hers and no one took what was hers, not even Harry.

After his third attempt to unfreeze his wife, Arthur spoke up before Ginny could say anything in response. "Mr. Potter, would you please release my wife?"

“Only if you keep her under control, Mr. Weasley.” Harry told him. “If she tries to attack me again, I will tie her up and hang her from the battlements of the school.”

Arthur nodded in agreement with those terms.

As soon as Molly was free she looked around for Harry and finding him, started to charge toward him, until Arthur barked out an order. “MOLLY! Sit down!”

“Arthur, this boy has humiliated and defiled our daughter and he has to pay.” Molly retorted.

“We need answers, Molly, before we take any action.” Arthur countered firmly. “Attacking Potter will not get us those answers.”

“So tell me boy, after everything my family did for you, all the pain and suffering we went through for and because of you, why did you steal my baby's virginity, her innocence?” Molly sneered in a manner that would do Snape proud as she sat down next to Arthur. Harry couldn't help noticing that her fists were tightly wrapped around the arm rests of her chair as if she were strangling them, since she couldn't touch her intended target... him... yet. “Is it your intention to destroy the entire Weasley Family? You claimed over and over again that you didn't want anything to do with her and then she winds up pregnant and carrying your spawn! What spell did you use on her to get her into your bed, so you could rape her without her fighting you? I know my daughter, if she'd been in her right mind, she would've fought like a wildcat rather than give herself to someone who held her in such contempt.”

“Molly, you don't know that that's what happened.” Arthur was shocked at the venom in his wife's voice. “Ginny told us, that she went to him willingly.”

“How do we know that Arthur?” Molly countered angrily. “He is a powerful wizard, more powerful even than Dumbledore. How do we know he didn't do something to her?”

Glaring at the woman he had once considered his second mother, Harry growled, "Mrs. Weasley, because of our past history and the respect I once held for your family, I will give you this one warning. Never ever call me boy again. Also I would be very careful about throwing around unproven accusations, or you might find yourself being challenged to a duel. As for your daughter's virginity, if the rumours, I've heard in the sixth year Gryffindor boy's dorm are even partly accurate, she lost that a long time ago and I can assure you it wasn't to me."

"How dare...." Molly began to growl.

"Mr. Potter, that was uncalled for." Dumbledore chided Harry. He needed to get the tempers defused, so this situation could be discussed calmly and rationally.

Harry rolled his eyes and pointed out. "Then she shouldn't ask questions she doesn't want the answers too. The sixth year boys were quite talkative about their conquests and the conquests of their friends in other houses. Ginny has quite a reputation amongst them."

Molly got to her feet intending to rip the Potter boy to shreds, when he brought his staff around and set the butt of it on the floor between them. She stopped moving certain he was about to hex her when he wrapped both hands around it, right hand above his left. She also noticed that the capstone had started to give off a pulsing green glow, almost like a heartbeat.

"I, Harry James Potter, do hereby swear upon my magic... and my life that I have never knowingly thought of or touched Ginevra Molly Weasley in a sexual manner at any time or in any place. Nor have I ever thought of Ginevra Molly Weasley as a sexual partner or lover. Nor as far as I can recall have I ever dreamed of having sex with her. I also hereby swear that even if Ginevra Molly Weasley were the last human female on earth and I the last male, I still would not consider having sex with her, even though I know such actions will lead to the end of the human race." There was a peculiar choral quality to Potter's voice as if there were more than one voice speaking as he made his oath and Molly thought she saw his green eyes giving off the same pulsing glow as the capstone of his staff and in time to it.

Ginny gasped as Harry swore that oath. How could Harry do this to them? How could he be so cruel and heartless? Why couldn't he just accept the truth? They were meant to be and now he was trying once more to destroy the life she had planned for them to live together.

As soon as Potter finished speaking, a blinding white glow covered him from head to toe. When it vanished, everyone saw that Harry was still standing.

"Well I'm still alive, so I must have been telling the truth." Harry waved his hand in the direction of Dumbledore's desk and a number of items gently rose off of it, circled their owner and returned to the desk. "I still have my magic too. Guess that proves I never slept with Gin-Gin. So we are now left with a question of how am I the father of that child. Would you care to tell us Gin-Gin?"

"Harry, you shouldn't scare me like that! After all I am carrying your child. Why would you pretend to swear an oath that you never slept with me? How could you forget that night we had together in the Gryffindor Common room. Even though it was my last night at Hogwarts, you were everything I dreamed you would be as a lover ever since I was a little girl. How can you be so cruel as to say that we never had that night together? You told me when we finished that you had found heaven in my arms." Ginny looked down blushing slightly as she said it.

Seeing he was still refusing to go along with her plans, Ginny walked over and thumped Harry on the chest with her fingertips a determined look on her face. "You are the father of our child, Harry, and nothing is going to change that. Now we need to start planning our wedding as well as where we are going to live, the nursery for the baby." Then her face softened at thought of the baby and she smiled down at the slight swell of her belly and took Harry's hand and rubbed it over her belly. "Your child is growing within me and he or she will be born in August or September. I hope it's a boy, and that he has his father's eyes."

Dumbledore had been watching the events unfold and felt compelled to say something as Harry snatched his hand back from Ginny. "Miss

Weasley, Mr. Potter didn't pretend to swear an oath. What he said was very real and his own magic judged his truthfulness. The fact that he is still alive and in possession of his rather formidable magic, means he was not nor has he ever been your lover."

"Ginevra, we know the child you carry is Harry's. How was it conceived?" Arthur demanded to know. He was having a hard time believing that another of his children would betray their family's honour.

"Arthur! You can't believe this fairy tale that Potter has spun." Molly couldn't believe that her husband would turn on their child. "Potter is powerful enough to fake an oath, and make it good enough to fool people."

"He might be able to fool us, but he can't fool magic." Arthur countered. "There is a book kept at the Ministry that records oaths that are sworn. Not the wording, but the fact that they were sworn and who they were sworn by and to as well as the where and when. I'm willing to bet if I have someone check the book it will show that Potter did indeed swear a magically binding oath here in Dumbledore's office."

"There's an easy way for your daughter to prove me wrong." Harry put in. "have her swear an oath on her magic, that I really did sleep with her on her last night here at Hogwarts and that it wasn't the product of her demented imagination."

Ginny stared back and forth between Harry and her parents, biting her lip nervously. If she didn't swear the oath, they would be fairly certain she was lying and if she did swear it and lost her magic, it would confirm that she had done something wrong. Ginny quickly weighed her options and decided.

"Ginny!" Molly shrieked as her daughter collapsed.

She rushed over to make sure she was ok.

"Drama queen," Harry muttered and conjuring a torrent of icy cold water, dumped it on Ginny.

“How dare you!” Molly sprang to her feet screeching like a banshee as Ginny sputtered and coughed, shivering from the icy cold water.

Before Arthur could intervene, Molly vanished from the room and they heard a screeching sound outside Dumbledore’s window. Hurrying over, Arthur confirmed his wife was hanging from the battlements outside Dumbledore’s tower.

“She will rejoin you when you leave.” Harry told Mr. Weasley. “Right now she is safer out there.”

“Ginevra Molly Weasley, as head of the Weasley family, I demand to know how you came to be pregnant with Potter’s child.” Arthur looked his only daughter in the eyes.

Ginny could feel the family magic take hold, compelling an answer from her. “It was a potion. I had some of his hair and that was all it needed.”

“Why?”

“Harry is mine. I knew he would come to me if I gave him the one thing he wanted above all else... a family.” Ginny met her father’s gaze without flinching. She knew Harry would do the right thing and marry her so she had nothing to lose.

Harry was silent through all of this as was Dumbledore. Both of them were thinking and planning. Harry finally realized there was only one way to get Ginny out of his life permanently and to make sure that the child she was carrying grew up in a happy home. It wouldn’t be with him though. He knew he was not yet ready to be a father because he still had too much anger toward the world to be a parent just now. The problem was going to be the how.

“Ginevra Molly Weasley,” Ginny winced at the frigid tone of Harry’s voice. This wasn’t how he was supposed to sound. He was supposed to be happy that they were going to be a family, no matter how their first child had been conceived. “I charge you with Line theft. You do realise that you could go to Azkaban for this crime.”

"No! You don't mean that Harry!" Tears started rolling down Ginny's face.

"I don't know why I am not surprised that you would do such a thing given your mother was telling you and Hermione how to make love potions when you were thirteen." Harry went on. "Did she give you the recipe for this pregnancy potion as well? I wonder if maybe she might have used the love potion on someone herself and that's why she was telling you about it, so you would know how to use it when the time came."

"No Harry! I got the information from Tom in my first year. Dung got me the potion from Knockturn Alley last year." Ginny protested, really crying now as she saw the shocked look on her father's face.

"Getting help from Voldemort? Not real smart Gin-Gin. The only reason I am not calling the Aurors right now is because of the respect I hold for your father." Harry continued. "However I am invoking the Life Debt you owe me for saving your life from Riddle during your first year. The child you are carrying is mine, but by theft, in violation of the Debt you owe me so I am calling it due. Surprising isn't it, given I told you that I would never call that Debt in, well you have forced my hand by your actions. The price I am demanding from you is my child that you are now carrying. You will carry the child until full term or until a Healer determines the baby must be born. You will take care of yourself so that the child will have the best chance at life and in no way, shape or form will you try to harm the child in any fashion. Once it is born it will be turned over to me without a whimper or any attempts to use it to bind me to you as you were attempting to do here today. Also Ginevra Molly Weasley, you will have no further contact of any kind with me and you will give to your father anything that you may have that makes you think of me, including anything that used to belong to me so that he can destroy them. You will keep nothing that even remotely reminds you of me. And in case you haven't understood anything about the oath I swore here today, Ginevra Molly Weasley, once that child is born and delivered to me, you will be dead to me. Do you understand what I have told you?"

Ginny gasped unwilling to believe that Harry would go that far. It had been centuries since that spell had been cast. It was usually only done for the greatest of family crimes, where there was no possible hope of the family member ever being brought back into the family because the crime they had committed was so unspeakable.

When Ginny continued to remain silent, Harry barked out. "Do you understand what I have said, bitch!"

Ginny flinched at the icy tone of his voice and nodded.

"Out loud, Ginevra!" Harry reminded her. "Say it out loud."

"I understand." Ginny stammered as her dreams went up in flames.

"I understand... who?" Harry persisted.

"I understand, Lord Potter and I will comply." Ginny completed the ritual response. It was rare that Life Debt ritual was used, but a life debt was like a magically binding contract and the terms had to be acknowledged by both payer and payee.

"Harry!" Dumbledore gasped, surprised that young Potter even knew of the Outcasting ritual. While it wasn't that complicated, the ritual was very old magic that hadn't been used in Britain in centuries because it was a complete and utter severance that could not be reversed by any means. Even the inheritance rituals that the goblins used to trace bloodlines wouldn't recognise you or your heirs as belonging to a family line once an outcasting was done. About the only place the ritual was still used as far as he knew was in portions of magical as well as muggle Japan. It was usually only used by the Head of the Family and then only when the Head felt that whatever the family member had done was totally unforgivable. Stating that someone was dead to you, meant that even if you were in the same room with them, you would not see or hear them and magic would keep them from coming anywhere near you. "Do you realise what you have done?"

"Yes, I have made sure this psycho stalker bitch understands that she has no more hope of getting me, since normal magical methods of

trying to get through that thick skull of hers weren't working." Harry didn't even bother looking at Dumbledore. "Now she will no longer harbour even the faint hope that I might change my mind, cause it can't be changed. Once that baby is born I will complete the ritual."

Harry looked at Arthur too. "Mr Weasley, I am calling your Life Debt due as well. When the child is born it will be given to me, without a fight. That child is mine. Ginevra stole what she needed to create it. Once the child has been turned over to me, no member of the Weasley or Prewitt family's currently living or in the future, with the exception of the twins, since they were the only ones to believe me innocent when I was sent to Azkaban, will make any attempt to locate the child or I. I swear that the child will not come to harm at my hands, but your family will have no part in raising it. It will be as if my child does not exist for you. Also Mr. Weasley, you will explain things to your wife and warn her that if she tries to interfere or harass me, that I will invoke my rights under the law with regards to your daughter. Also sir, while this is not part of the debt, I would strongly recommend you get your daughter some help. Surely even you can see she has some major problems."

"I understand and will comply, Lord Potter." Arthur didn't even wait to be asked, knowing that Harry was letting Ginny off easily, when he could've sent her to Azkaban for life. Line theft was a very serious crime in the wizarding world.

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A few weeks after learning that he was to be a father, Harry got a letter by owl from Myra Armstaad his solicitor in London. She had had someone monitoring Dudley's trial and she had written to tell him that barring any last minute surprises today was to be the last day of testimony and that a verdict was expected before the end of the day.

Harry decided to skip classes for the day and go see what the judgement was for Duddikins.

By the time he slid into a seat near the back of the courtroom, the closing arguments were being made. While not real experienced in legal matters, Harry thought the Crown Prosecutor did a better job at

restating the facts of his case than did Dudley's Solicitor, but then again, he knew Dudley was guilty.

When the jury retired to deliberate his cousin's fate, Harry took out his notebook and began making some notes about what he needed to do regarding the child that Ginny was carrying. He wanted to make sure it grew up safe and happy, without any possible hint that it was his child. He'd found a few things in the library at Hogwarts that might help but he would need the help of at least one other to carry it off. He was trying to work out the best approach to use, when a voice interrupted his plotting.

"What are you doing here? Did you come here to gloat?" Petunia hissed. "You swore to stay away from us. Aren't you afraid of losing that freakishness of yours?"

Harry looked up at her and wasn't really surprised by the changes. She was no longer so immaculately dressed or made up the way she used to be. According to Myra, Inland Revenue had taken a lot of their money for back taxes and Vernon had lost his job as General Manager at Grunnings because of the scandal of him stealing from his wife's nephew. He couldn't help wondering just how long it would be before they had to move away from Privet Drive, if they hadn't already to get away from the gossips. "If you will remember Aunt Petunia, I swore not to come to your home unless asked by you and that I would never voluntarily approach or speak with you. I also told you it was possible you would see me since I was going to be living in Britain and this is a small island country. As for gloating... yes, you might say I came to gloat... just a little. I'm entitled to gloat after all the pain and suffering I was put through by you and your family when I was growing up."

After taking a quick look around to make sure there was no one nearby, Petunia hissed like an angry goose. "We didn't want you, but we took you in anyway. We put a roof over your head, clothes on your back and food in your mouth..."

"And you were well paid for doing that," Harry interrupted her attempt at self-justification, "though you never spent any of that money on me, the one it was intended for. Instead you treated me like a slave. Don't

talk to me about taking me in out of the goodness of your hearts. It was greed for you pure and simple. The money you were being paid and safety for your family as long as I lived there and called that place home. You want to know something Aunt Petunia, I'm willing to bet the protections that were supposed to be in place collapsed a long time ago, because as soon as I was able to understand what a home really was, I never thought of Privet Drive as home. Which means if my kind could've been bothered to really look, they probably could've found your home without any trouble whatsoever."

"Just more proof that you and your kind can't be trusted." Petunia retorted.

Harry spoke up before she had a chance to get away. "The wards might have worked correctly if you were capable of loving someone other than yourself, Petunia. I don't think you even loved Dudley or Vernon. You indulged your son yes and you acted the part of a loving wife and mother, but I think it was more pride and your fierce determination to be seen as normal, than it was real love. I think you knew deep down that what you were doing to me was wrong. And as for Dudley, I think you knew that letting him grow up without any discipline was going to backfire one day when you could no longer blame me for his crimes. All that aside, I have a question for you Petunia, and I would like you to give me an honest answer... if you are even capable of it."

"What?" Petunia had her nose in the air as if she were certain that what he wanted to know couldn't possibly be of interest to her.

"If you and Vernon had died and my parents were the only ones available to take Dudley in, do you think my parents would've treated Dudley the way you treated me? Or would they have treated him like their own child?" Harry inquired curious to see what her answer was.

"I don't see the point in wasting my time with what ifs." Petunia countered. "Your parents are dead, so trying to figure out what they might or might not have done is a pointless exercise."

"You're afraid to answer my question." Harry countered. "You know they would've treated him better than you ever treated me. I wonder

how you will explain YOURSELF to my Mum when you pass on, not to mention how you will explain your actions to the god you claim to believe in. I doubt he would approve of how you treated me either.”

“It’s well known he doesn’t like your kind.” Petunia sniffed haughtily. “It says so in the bible.”

“I wouldn’t be too sure of that if I were you.” Harry countered. “The word witch might be mistranslated from the original language it was written in. The word in its original language might not mean witch or wizard, but instead may be describing one who practices harmful magic. You know like how the Commandment: ‘Thou shalt not kill’ might actually be: ‘Thou shalt not murder’. Otherwise the bible is full of contradictions, because in the Old Testament, he approves of stoning adulterers and that is killing isn’t it?”

Before Petunia could come up with a response there was the sound of people filing back into the courtroom. The jury had made their judgement.

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As Harry took hold of the portkey that would take him to visit Azkaban, he couldn’t help but smile at the appropriateness of Dudley’s sentence.

While the whale had lost weight during his stay in jail, given Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon hadn’t been able to raise the necessary money to get him out until the trial he still appeared to weigh enough to match any sumo wrestler.

The verdict was that Dudley was guilty on all counts. He remembered the judge lamenting the fact that the option of offering a first offender like Dudley the choice of signing up to serve in the military rather than go to jail was no longer available. He had told them that he had found that the majority of those who took that option went on to become a productive member of society, instead of being a useless layabout in prison with their food and other necessities being provided at the taxpayer’s expense. He had also commented that the option might not be able to be offered to Dudley, even if it were still available

because he was so obese and might not survive the very demanding basic training.

Dudley was sentenced to ten years for the extortion charge and two years each for the five assaults he was found guilty of with the sentences to be run consecutively, which meant that Dudley would be in prison for at least twenty years. True it was possible that he might get time off for good behaviour, but it was also possible that Snape would wash his hair and develop a love for dancing the ballet with Harry Potter too.

Harry had grinned broadly at that as he saw both Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon go red in the face when he claimed their son would be a useless waste of space in prison. Harry reflected that Dudley had been a useless waste of space outside prison why should that change once he was in prison.

The next part of the sentence though had made Harry's day if not his whole year and made Harry want to kiss the judge. The judge told Dudley that while he was in prison he would be placed on a mandatory diet until he reached the proper weight for someone of his age and height. The judge told Dudley that he wasn't going to get out of prison by dying or by having a heart attack that would cause him to be moved to a prison medical facility for the remainder of his sentence and make him an even bigger drain on the British taxpayer.

The expression on Dudley's face was even better than Vernon and Petunia's had been. He looked as though he'd just been told he was going to be shot by a firing squad at dawn. Then the stupid git had to have a temper tantrum that made him look like he was all of five years old, stamping his feet, wailing for his mum. The only thing that had been missing was Dudley falling on the ground and pounding his feet and fists on the floor because he'd been told something he didn't want to hear.

The portkey that Madame Bones had provided for him deposited Harry in the Warden's office at Azkaban prison and he managed to avoid stumbling this time.

The warden was standing there waiting for him. "Good day Lord Potter."

"Warden," Harry responded flatly. He hated this place and all the memories it brought up for him, but it wasn't this wizard's fault.

"I understand from Madame Bones that you wish to visit with Prisoner Severus Snape, is that correct?" This warden was brisk and business like. While he understood that there were sometimes changes in the daily routine, the warden preferred to get them over with as quickly as possible.

"Yes, in private if that is possible." Harry told him. "I have some business concerning my family that I would like to discuss with him. Is that possible to arrange?"

"Yes, it can be if you don't mind speaking to Mr. Snape in his cell." The warden told him after a few moments.

Harry shrugged. "If it is the only way, then I will speak to him in his cell."

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"You have a visitor, Snape." The guard for his wing of the prison announced as he opened the door to Snape's cell.

The former potion's teacher was surprised when the last person he ever expected to see at Azkaban came strolling into his cell.

"Just call when you are ready to leave, Lord Potter." The guard requested as he locked the door again.

Harry nodded.

"Come to gloat?" Snape growled in an almost bore tone of voice.

"Nope," Harry told him. "I have a question and depending on your answer, I may be making you an offer."

“What question?” Snape couldn’t help being curious as he eyed Potter as if he might be a source of some entertainment. He could only do so much meditation before even that became boring.

Harry handed over a folded piece of paper. “If I get you the ingredients and the equipment to do so, can you make this potion?”

Snape’s eyes widened at the name of the potion written there. Why would Potter need this particular potion? He eyed Potter suspiciously, wondering just what the Golden boy of Gryffindor had been up to since his incarceration. “Do you understand what this potion will do?”

“Yes.” Harry did not elaborate. “Can you make it?”

“Yes.” Snape was equally abrupt.

“Then to my offer, since I want to keep this matter as quiet as possible.” Harry told him. “If you make the potion, I will consider your debt to me paid in full. Once you are out of here, I will arrange for you to be paid for making the wolfsbane potion for the foundation every month, and if the werewolves will allow it, I will even pay you to find a cure as long as said cure is not fatal. The only thing I will require from you is a magically binding oath that you will not mention this matter or the fact that I made you this offer, either verbally, in written form, or even telepathically, if wizards are capable of such a thing with anyone or anything.”

“And if I refuse?” Snape wanted to know.

Harry shrugged, “then I will oblivate you and wipe this conversation from your mind and you will still be obligated to make the wolfsbane potion for the foundation every month and you will not be paid for doing so. This is your chance to clear the debt you owe my father and get paid for your potions skills and if you are lucky, you could go down in history as the person who found a cure for lycanthropy.”

Snape stared at the boy... no young man in front of him. He had hardly expected this response from Potter, the model Gryffindor. But then again, he wouldn’t have expected a Gryffindor to need or want this particular potion either.

(AN: Yes, I know I said this was going to be the last chapter, but the file size limitation thing got me again. Fortunately, I found out after I completed the chapter, so you get 2 chapters for the price of 1. Surprise! :D)

The Fat Lady Is Singing

Hermione stared up at the canopy of her bed in the seventh year dorm, unable to go to sleep on her final night at Hogwarts, because her mind kept going over the fact that her life seemed to have come full circle today. She had arrived at Hogwarts with no friends and she was leaving Hogwarts with no real friends. Oh she had acquaintances, which was a vast improvement on what she had before, but no real friends. Her relationship with Ron had ended that afternoon as they were discussing their plans for life after Hogwarts. There were a lot of factors responsible for its demise; the strain of trying to deal with what they had done to Harry, even though Ron wouldn't admit they were at fault for some of it, the fact that they had very differing views about what was important in life, and she finally admitted at least to herself, the fact that Harry was not there to act as a buffer between them. Last year they had held together because of what they saw as Harry's betrayal of the Light and everything it stood for, but once that righteous anger had been shown to have no real foundation, the rest of the pillars holding Ron's and Hermione's friendship together had begun to crumble as well. She finally acknowledged that she had no one to blame but herself for the destruction of the bonds that had made her friends with Harry and Ron the night they had saved her from the Troll. True Harry had been more responsible for her being saved than Ron, but they had still come to rescue her and that had been the beginning. She had thought it would last forever, especially given all they had gone through but that had been a childish dream.

As Hermione rolled over and closed her eyes, determined to get some sleep, she breathed a sigh of relief that there had been no more problems between Harry and the other students at school. While she was bound by her vow to stay away from him, it was apparent that the other Gryffindors had finally figured out that if they left Potter alone their lives and the lives of their fellow students would be a lot more peaceful. That peace had been essential given the fifth and seventh year students in all the houses had been getting ready for their OWLs and NEWTs. They didn't have time to make an issue of the fact that Potter still hadn't and clearly never would forgive them for what they had done the previous year and the other Gryffindors had simply followed their lead.

The fact that Potter was not going on a rampage though didn't mean that everything was all sweetness and light at Hogwarts. Rumour had it that Malfoy was still a ferret and would probably remain so for quite some time to come, even though Potter had made it quite clear in April what he would have to do to regain human form, when he had been confronted by an angry Pansy Parkinson, who was furious that her future husband was still a ferret.

Opinion on whether or not Malfoy deserved to be condemned to live life as a ferret was mixed. Most of the Hufflepuffs and Gryffindors, no matter what year they were in, were enjoying the idea of Malfoy having to spend the remainder of his life as a ferret, given they didn't think he would ever admit he was wrong for what he tried to do to Potter. Most Ravenclaws and Slytherins felt that it was wrong of Potter to expect Malfoy to make such a concession. They all knew Malfoy would never admit he was wrong about anything, even if the truth came up and slapped him on the face.

And Luna Lovegood was acting even loonier, if that were possible. For the past month she had been going on about how the Knocklebots were going to help her become the mother of Neville's child before the end of the year and that she and Neville's grandmother would be raising it. Hermione and everyone else in the school has ignored her claim though given that Luna was widely known to be a few knuts short of a galleon.

One thing Hermione was fairly certain of though was that after tomorrow, she might never see Harry ever again, unless it was by accident. He had made it quite clear during the school year that he held the wizarding world in contempt for its habit of making judgements without all the facts and as he called it their willingness to be led like sheep by those at the Ministry, who were clearly idiots. Hermione had been very annoyed at his blanket condemnation of the wizarding world. A lot of witches and wizards were not willing to be led around like sheep. The problem was they were in the minority and unable to make themselves heard by those in power. The realisation of that fact and the part she had played in it, still brought a stab of pain to Hermione whenever she thought about how she had treated her first real friend, not to mention how she at least for a while, had proven herself to be one of the sheep.

As Hermione began to doze off, her last thought before wandering into dreams of what her life would be like after tomorrow was a prayer that Harry had no more surprises left as parting gifts for them.

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As the students of the four houses were enjoying their final breakfast at Hogwarts, watched over by all the teachers and the Headmaster, Hermione noticed that Harry wasn't among them. Where was he?

As if in answer to her thought the doors to the Great Hall slammed open with a thud and Harry walked in dressed in the robes that proclaimed him the head of three houses.

The silence in the Great Hall was almost deafening and the students looked at each other worriedly. Even though he didn't have his staff with him this time, they were all wondering who had managed to piss Potter off now.

Hermione heard Ron muttering beside her. "Stupid git. Always has to make a grand entrance."

"Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts, former Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards, you and I have a piece of business to conclude before I take my leave of you." Harry looked very solemn and not the least bit angry. "As Head of the House of Potter I call you to face long overdue justice for breaking a magically binding contract."

Dumbledore paled and his eyes lost their twinkle as the students gasped at the accusation. "I'm afraid I don't know what magical contract you are referring to, Mr. Potter. I have a number of them to deal with every day, but none of the ones I have dealt with recently have involved you or the House of Potter in any way."

"The contract I am referring to was not a recent one." Harry countered. "Were you not the executor of my parent's wills?"

"I was." Dumbledore remained seated at the high table, giving the appearance of having nothing to worry about. "Perhaps we should discuss this matter privately, Mr. Potter. I am certain you do not want your personal business spread all over the wizarding world before nightfall."

"My life has never been a private matter as far as the wizarding world is concerned. They've poked their noses into every aspect of my life, except where you managed to keep them out, so why should that stop now. You only want privacy because you don't want them to know what you did." Harry retorted. "Merlin forbid that the wizarding world should ever think of Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore as anything less than the guardian of light and an honourable man."

"Mr. Potter, how dare you accuse the Headmaster of doing something so dishonourable as not honouring a magically binding contract?" McGonagall demanded. "He has never been less than honourable in all of his dealings."

"Oh really," Harry drawled, sounding like Malfoy for a moment. "Do you know the entire contents of my parent's wills, Professor McGonagall? Or do you just know what they left you?"

"No, I don't know everything contained in their wills, but I have no reason to doubt Dumbledore's honour." She retorted.

"Well, then you have no right to take me to task because unlike you, I do know the entire contents of my parent's wills, including the provisions for guardianship." Harry countered looking at Dumbledore. "Have you forgotten our conversation in Ollivander's shop, Professor McGonagall?"

McGonagall and the students looked back and forth between Potter and Dumbledore wondering what was going on. McGonagall remembered Harry accusing Dumbledore of violating the terms of his parent's wills the day she had taken him to Diagon Alley, but since he hadn't done anything about it she thought the matter had been settled. Breaking a magically binding contract was a very serious thing. A person could lose their magic or their life, depending on the terms of the contract.

“Harry, this is really a matter we should discuss in private.” Dumbledore made one more try even though he knew the students would assume the worst, but given they didn’t know what part of the will had been violated, he might be able to come up with an explanation that would satisfy them and their families. Given that Harry hadn’t come charging in here the way he had when Ginny had attacked Luna Lovegood, they might assume it was a minor breach, that he wanted resolved publicly.

“I did not give you the right to be so familiar with me Dumbledore.” Harry countered. “And neither of us is going anywhere... at least not yet. Did you think I would not find out what you had done? Or maybe you thought I would forgive and forget it because your ignoring the instructions in my parent’s wills was for the Greater Good?”

“Harry,” Colin Creevy spoke up from his seat at the Gryffindor table when it became evident that Harry and the Headmaster were going to engage in a staring contest until something broke the stalemate. “Just how did the Headmaster violate your parent’s wills?”

“My parent’s wills contained a list of those they considered suitable guardians for me if my Godfather Sirius Black was not available to take care of me.” Harry answered his question without taking his eyes off the Headmaster. “Their list also contained one exception. They stated quite clearly that under no circumstances was I ever to be placed in the custody of Petunia Evans Dursley or her husband Vernon Dursley at any time or for any reason. Their wills said that even Voldemort was a better choice for guardian than Aunt Petunia, given how she loathed magic. And yet knowing that, Dumbledore went against my parents stated wishes and placed me in that hellhole.”

“Harry...” Dumbledore began.

“I told you, you do not have the right to use my name. I am Lord Potter to you.” Harry interrupted him.

“Very well, Lord Potter,” Dumbledore said placatingly. “While I will admit I knew that your parents didn’t want you placed with the

Dursleys it was necessary to keep you safe. Remember what I told you at the end of your fifth year, after Sirius was killed at the Ministry. The protection your mother placed on you required you be placed with your mother's blood kin to work. Petunia and her son Dudley were the only ones you could be placed with to keep you alive, until the time came for you to fulfil the prophecy. I am fairly certain your parents would have understood and I'm certain you understand now why I had to ignore their wishes with regard to your placement. They kept you safe."

"Well you were wrong, not once but twice." Harry countered. "I had a goblin ward master check out Privet Drive this past month. And while he admits there were blood wards there, which is Dark magic by the way according to the Ministry, he told me they collapsed due to lack of power to maintain them nearly fourteen years ago. Your claim that even though my Aunt took me in grudgingly was enough to provide the protection was wrong. They collapsed within a year after I was placed there and you knew it. There were other wards placed there afterwards that were also detected by the goblins and I was told that my magic had been powering them. No wonder I sometimes had problems making spells work right, given that you tied my magic into the wards that were protecting those wastes of space I laughingly call my family. Do you remember what else you told me that night? About when I arrived at Hogwarts that first night?"

"Yes," Dumbledore didn't elaborate. He could see the looks of shock and disgust on some of the faces in the Great Hall. He knew was going to have a lot of explaining to do later on.

"You didn't place me with the Dursley's for my protection. You placed me there so you could mould your weapon to defeat Voldemort without getting your own hands dirty." Harry told the room at large. "According to your own words, which I remember very well thanks to the Dementors, 'five years ago you arrived at Hogwarts, neither as happy or as well nourished as I would have liked, but you were alive. You were not a pampered prince but as normal a little boy as I could have hoped for under the circumstances. Thus far my plan was working well.' I was not a normal little boy, unless it is considered normal in the wizarding world for a child to be treated as a slave from the time they are four years of age. Forced to watch as my cousin is

showered with love and all the things that go along with it, while I am called a freak, starved, worked nearly to death, beaten for things that were not my fault, and not even knowing my own name until I went to school, and that only happened because they couldn't hide the fact I lived there. If they could have, I don't think I would have gone to school either."

"You were safe there." Dumbledore insisted. "That was the most important thing. I tried to make up for the rest while you were here. It had to be done that way you had to understand suffering to be able to overcome it. And you are overcoming it. You will be a great asset to the Wizarding world because of all you have gone through."

"I hate to tell you this Dumbledork, but today is the last anyone in the wizarding world will see of me, except for a few that I have unfinished business with. Your plan to make me the saviour of the wizarding world because of its own stupidity, has failed as well. I know you hoped that I would forgive all those who wronged me last year, but that won't happen until the sun is a burnt out cinder in the sky and we all are dead, and maybe not even then." Harry disagreed. "You are condemned out of your own mouth. You have admitted to knowingly breaking the contract."

"Your parents would have understood why I did what I did." Dumbledore insisted.

"But they aren't the ones you have to answer to, I am." Harry reminded him. "I am the one who suffered the most because you felt you had the right to play God with my life. I am the one who spent almost a year of my life in hell, because you thought you had failed to correctly mould your weapon and it was going to turn on you so you wanted it put away before it had the chance to. I am just grateful you didn't choose to steal from me in addition to your other crimes. I've spent most of this year thinking about what I was going to do and making sure it could be done, especially since I didn't want to harm Fawkes. I don't hold him responsible for your actions, though I do have to wonder why he never left you, once you started committing acts that meant you were no longer on the side of Light."

Harry went silent for a moment before intoning in a solemn voice, "I, Lord Harry James Potter, call upon magic to witness my plea as the one most harmed by the actions of Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore when he deliberately broke the terms of my parent's wills, I do hereby request the following punishment for him. That he have no more magic than a squib, or enough to insure that Fawkes is not harmed, but no matter how much magic you leave him with that he no longer have the power, influence, or ability to harm another as he has harmed me. If you find me plea just, so let it be done."

"You can't do that, Mr. Potter!" McGonagall protested. "Albus Dumbledore has always done the very best for the people of the wizarding world, even when it cost him dearly to do so."

Potter had a broad grin on his face as he once again contradicted her. "Actually Dumbledork brought this down on his own head. If he hadn't felt compelled to meddle last June in a vain effort to try and get me to forgive those in the wizarding world who wronged me, none of the events of this past year would've happened. You see I originally just planned to find somewhere in the non-magical world to live out the rest of my life. If Dumbledork hadn't interfered with that plan, Snape might still be a teacher here. Umbridge would probably still be scheming right along side Fudge in the very corrupt Ministry. Ron would still be a prefect and his sister the psycho stalker would still be walking the halls of Hogwarts, jumping anything that was wearing pants. And last but not least Draco Malfoy would not have become a ferret when I returned his spell to him."

Harry glanced around the Great Hall that was still as silent as a tomb as the students and teachers listened intently. He was willing to bet that a number of people would be buying pensieves over the next few days if they didn't have one just to make sure this was reported correctly. "I know for a fact that if Dumbledore were to retain his magic, and I were stupid enough to ever trust him again, then I would quickly find myself once again as the puppet dancing on his strings... for the Greater Good of course."

"You're wrong." Everyone heard Ron Weasley shout from his position at the Gryffindor table. "You are too ungrateful a git to realise when someone is trying to help you and let them."

“Ah we hear from the sole remaining weasel at the school, thought not for much longer. I’m not surprised you would speak up for your master, given he paid you to befriend me during my first year and to make sure I chose Gryffindor, instead of Slytherin when I was being sorted.” As the students in the Hall gasped at the news that Potter might have been in Slytherin and that Ron Weasley had been paid to make sure he chose Gryffindor, Harry continued, “I do hope you were well paid for your actions, because I think you are going to have trouble getting a job, now that you are out of school given you did so poorly in your classes, even with Hermione’s help.”

There were some snickers from around the room as he said this, because many knew that for all his bluster, Ron Weasley really was little more than muscle. He might be lucky enough to be a low level auror, but they doubted that he had the skill for his true desire to play Quidditch for the Chuddley Cannons.

“My business within this school is completed and Dumbledore, your final attempt at manipulating me has failed. I do not intend to be the saviour of the wizarding world once again, because the purebloods don’t realise that they have condemned the British magical people to a slow but certain death, because of bigoted policies designed to keep the purebloods in power and the muggle-borns on the outside and inbreeding. The wizarding world can go hang for all I care.” With that, Harry Potter vanished from the Great Hall.

As the Great Hall exploded with noise, McGonagall felt the link for the wards surrounding Hogwarts settle into her magical core declaring her the Headmistress. Dumbledore was now without the majority of his magic. It was a sad day for the magical world.

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Dantes walked into a very noisy Great Hall and headed for the head table where the teachers and Headmaster were seated. From the expression on the ancient wizard’s face, Dumbledore had apparently received a shock a short time ago and hadn’t had a chance to recover.

Well, Dantes thought to himself, I hope he can take another one, because I would hate to go down in history as the wizard who gave Dumbledore a heart attack.

As the students realised there was a stranger at the head table, silence again fell over the room like a wave. Those closest to the head table wanted to hear what was being said by this stranger given that it was rare to have visitors in the morning on the last day at Hogwarts.

“Good morning Headmaster.” Dantes greeted the elder wizard.

Dumbledore looked at him a moment before replying. “Greetings, Lord Dantes, but unfortunately as of this morning, I am no longer the Headmaster. If you need to discuss school matters, I believe you will need to speak to Headmistress McGonagall.”

“I am sorry to hear that.” Dantes sounded as if he really meant it. “My visit here today is to inform you that as of the end of this school year there will be a change in the governance of this school. I as the heir of Rowena Ravenclaw am taking Hogwarts back from the people of wizarding Britain...”

“You can’t do that!” Hermione shouted from her position near the head of the Gryffindor table.

Dantes turned to face the Gryffindor table and the person who had interrupted him. “And why can’t I, Miss...”

“Hermione Granger.” She got to her feet determined to challenge him. “And you can’t take Hogwarts away from the control of the people of magical Britain, because of the charter one of your ancestors signed, along with the other Founder’s heirs that ceded control to the people of Wizarding Britain in perpetuity.”

“Ah yes, that charter.” Dantes smile if anything grew even wider. “You are very knowledgeable. Why are you not in Ravenclaw house?”

“Because the Sorting Hat felt I was a better fit for Gryffindor.” Hermione told him and then demanded. “Don’t change the subject!

You have no right to take control of the school according to the charter. It says so in Hogwarts a History.”

“Ah yes that biased and inaccurate book.” Dantes nodded. “Actually, it is the Charter mentioned in that book that gives me the right to take control of the school back.”

Hermione looked as if she wanted to slap him for daring to call one of her favourite books biased and inaccurate, but before she could say anything further, McGonagall asked, “How does the Charter give you control?”

“I’m sure you are very familiar with legal loopholes.” At McGonagall’s nod Dantes continued, “Well the Founder’s Heirs were fairly intelligent and put a well disguised one in the Charter, hoping it would never be needed. Basically the Charter states that Hogwarts will remain under the control of the people of magical Britain, or its chosen representatives, only so long as the government has no part in teaching the children at Hogwarts without the Headmaster or Headmistress’ approval and even then there needed to be a very good reason as to why. No laws forcing said employee upon the school. The charter didn’t cover former government employees only active ones, such as Delores Umbridge. She remained Undersecretary to the Minister while she was teaching Defence Against the Dark Arts and while she was pretending to be Headmistress.”

“If you don’t mind, I think we need to discuss this matter in private, Lord Dantes.” McGonagall got to her feet. “Also if you don’t mind, I would like Dumbledore to accompany us because I would like his input as well.”

“It doesn’t bother me.” Dantes shrugged and waited for Headmistress McGonagall and the former Headmaster to lead the way.

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Once they were all seated in what used to be Dumbledore’s office, with Fawkes perched on Dumbledore’s rather bony knees,

McGonagall asked. "What is your real reason for taking control of the school?"

"Because I can," Dantes told her. "I have done some checking over the school records for the past one hundred years and did you know that the schools of magical Europe have fallen way behind their counterparts in other countries, like China, Japan, Australia, and America, just to name a few. Hogwarts has the lowest scores of all three of the major magical schools and that has got to change. My ancestor founded this school along with others to provide the best magical education available to young witches and wizards, but that standard has been lost. I intend to get it back."

"And how do you intend to do that?" Dumbledore wanted to know.

"The school will be shut down until I can redesign the curriculum and get teachers who are the very best in their professions to teach them. Some of the old courses will be brought back so that the children can understand all sides of magic; light, dark, and grey. This school will not reopen until I have teachers and courses I feel will not shame this school. Also there will be non-magical classes taught here as well, because the non-magical world, no matter how much witches and wizards may want to believe otherwise is slowly encroaching on us and we must be able to deal with them as equals and not as backwards idiots." The expression on Dantes' face was grim.

"You are just going to close the school with no warning, what about the teachers who have devoted their lives to teaching here?" McGonagall asked when she finally recovered from the shock of this young man telling her he considered her work substandard.

"All teachers will have the option to try for new teaching positions, once I have the curriculum decided. If they meet the standards I want they will be given first preference over any others since they have a history with this school." Dantes assured her, but then he said. "If they are not capable, I will not be hiring them back."

"You do realise you will be driving good teachers away." Dumbledore pointed out. "There is no need to do a wholesale change. It is far better to do it gradually."

“When was the last time any course was improved on or changed for a better one without the change being imposed on you from the outside?” Dantes inquired, knowing the answer already. “British magical society is stagnant. There have been no major changes in over one hundred years at least and even then they were only minor changes. If we are to survive as a people changes need to be made and made quickly.”

“And when will this occur?” McGonagall wanted to know.

“Today,” Dantes told her flatly. “Once the students get on the train the school will close until I think we are ready to reopen. You will need to let the students know, because I doubt I will have all the changes, I want to make, done before September.”

“Surely you can see how disruptive this will be to the children’s lives, especially those who are second through sixth year.” Dumbledore protested. “Why not do a gradual shut down, but don’t take in any new first years and then as each year finishes, it will not be replaced, until the second years complete their seventh year? That way their lives are not disrupted and it will give you seven years to complete your plans.”

“No.” Dantes disagreed. “I have thought this over and it would be far better in the long run for them to be with other children their own age, rather than realising that with each year they are getting fewer and fewer in number. Not to mention the stigma they will feel at knowing they were the last. You have your orders headmistress. Let the students know today before they leave. I have already made arrangements for the parents to be notified by owl post tomorrow.”

“What about the house elves, the paintings, and the ghosts?” McGonagall wanted to know.

“The house elves will be staying on. Hagrid will also be asked to stay on and help with the modifications as well as the current maintenance along with Mr Filch. There is a lot of work that needs to be done to upgrade this castle to get it ready for future students and I hope they will help with that. As for the paintings and the ghosts, I have no

doubt they are being told right now.” Dantes gestured with his thumb toward one of the empty portraits of one of the former Headmasters.

“You do realise that some may choose not to come to this new school of yours?” Dumbledore pointed out.

“That’s possible,” Dantes shrugged. “But if purebloods and halfbloods won’t attend the new Hogwarts, muggle-borns certainly will. And who knows we might even get students from other countries as well.”

“Is there anyway we can convince you not to go through with this plan?” Dumbledore was willing to beg if that was what it would take.

“No.” Dantes told him. “I am the master of Hogwarts and after today, it will only listen to me.”

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On July 31st, a large portion of wizarding Britain received a shock when they opened their morning paper. In big bold type the headline read: **Hogwarts Closed!** and then underneath it in slightly smaller print Founder Rowena Ravenclaw’s Heir Lord Liam Dantes states that Hogwarts will be closed for the foreseeable future.

The article took up the whole front page. It outlined Dantes reason’s for closing the school at least for now and how he was able to take control of the school back, given Fudge had violated the terms of the charter ceding control of the school to the people of magical Britain by placing Delores Umbridge into Hogwarts as the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher while she also remained an active Ministry employee. A Ministry legal expert had confirmed that Lord Dantes did indeed have the right to do so because of Fudge’s actions, though he lamented the fact that Dantes had chosen to do so. The parents who had children who would’ve been first years at Hogwarts this year and former students who had no students currently attending were furious at both the Ministry for creating the situation that allowed him to take control of the school back and Dantes for doing it.

At the Ministry, it was discovered that Fudge had not shown up for work that morning, but a quick check of his home showed he was still

alive. He was apparently unwilling to step beyond the wards of his house, until the furore died down. The aurors were just glad he had chosen to do so. That meant they weren't wasting manpower trying to protect the idiot.

What passed almost unnoticed that day in the Daily Prophet because of the chaos caused by the news of Hogwarts closing was a small article listing the death of Albus Dumbledore, the former Headmaster of Hogwarts and defeater of Grindelwald. The article had listed his accomplishments and also it listed the fact that the previous month he had been reduced to little better than a Squib for violating the terms of the Potter's wills by placing their son with Lily Potter's sister. The article also claimed that the reason for Dumbledore's rapid decline was he had lost the will to live after all the losses he had suffered through the previous year from the loss of his seat on the Wizengamot to losing his position as Headmaster as well as his spectacular failure at trying to keep Lord Harry Potter in magical Britain.

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On that same July 31st morning, Ginny Weasley suddenly went into labour and at one minute after midnight on August 1st, she gave birth to a son at the Burrow.

When he saw his first grandchild, Arthur Weasley was glad he had gotten a magical oath out of his medi-wizard friend to not discuss this matter with anyone else and had arranged for him to deliver the baby at the Burrow. While the cap of downy brown hair covering the newborn's head wouldn't indicate who the father was, the emerald green eyes that looked up at Arthur for the first time, could only have one source: Harry Potter. Green eyes were a rarity in the wizarding world and currently the only wizard in magical Britain with them was Harry, even though no one had seen him since his departure from the Great Hall.

Arthur felt a great deal of regret over the fact that he would never ever see this grandchild again. That there would be no pictures of him growing up, or even glimpses of him at a distance. Arthur still remembered how angry Molly had been over the terms of the Life

Debt and the fact that the child would have no place in their lives. Arthur had had to invoke a rarely used power of the Head of House to force Molly to accept that this child was lost to them before it had even been born because Ginny had stolen the means to create it.

After confirming with his friend that the child was healthy enough to travel by portkey even though it had been born a bit early and before Ginny or Molly had a chance to see the baby, Arthur Weasley took his grandchild downstairs and went into his office to get the portkey that he had been given to take him and the baby to Harry's location after it was born. He was not going to take any chances that the payment of the Life Debts owed by he and Ginny would be violated by anyone in his family.

Holding the baby carefully but securely in his arms, Arthur made sure they both were in contact with the portkey as he said the activation phrase. "Payment has come due."

He appeared in a darkened room. The fire in the fireplace was providing the only illumination in the room. As he was looking around, the door on the far side of the room opened and with the light behind him Arthur couldn't make out who it was, but assumed it was Harry. A moment later his guess was confirmed when Harry appeared in the firelight.

"Hello Arthur, I take it Ginny has given birth?" Harry stated the obvious.

"A few hours ago," Arthur confirmed. "I just wish this could have been a happier occasion, for both of us."

"So do I, sir, but I never would have been your son-in-law, no matter how much Ginny wanted it." The contempt was not evident in Harry's voice now. "At one time, I would have welcomed your family's presence at the birth of any child I did have, since you were the closest thing to a family I had ever had. I'm just sorry that is no longer true."

"So am I, Harry. I want you to know that I will always think of you as a son, in spite of what happened." Placing a kiss on the downy brown

head of his blanket wrapped barely a few hours old grandson, Arthur handed the newborn baby over to his father. "Here is your son, Harry."

"Thank you Arthur." Taking his son in his arms, Harry turned and walked out of the room without another word.

Arthur took hold of the portkey once more and with tears running down his face, he said, "home."

Once he was back in his office, Arthur did as he had been instructed by Harry and threw the portkey in the fireplace. He watched it carefully to make sure it was completely destroyed so that no one could backtrack the location he had been transported to.

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At midday on August 1st, Luna Lovegood walked into Longbottom manor a child in her arms only to be greeted by a house elf.

"How can Nippy help you?" the house elf asked.

"Would you please tell Lady Longbottom, I am here with her great-grandchild." Luna requested. For once she was acting in a practical, matter-of-fact manner.

The house elf nodded and vanished with a pop.

Lady Augusta Longbottom appeared a few minutes later and walked over to Luna a large smile on her face. "You have Neville's child."

"He has a fine son to carry on the Longbottom and Lovegood lines." Luna uncovered the sleeping child's face. The child's head was covered with a cap of fine silvery blond down and the child's eyes opened at the sound of the strange voice. Augusta Longbottom gasped at the beautiful aquamarine eyes her great-grandchild had. "Everything has been properly done to make sure he is legally recognised as my child and Neville's. Even an Inheritance ritual won't show any different."

“Welcome to the family, my dear.” Augusta embraced Luna and the baby. “This day has been a long time coming.”

The End

(AN: Author watches as the bunny saunters off into the sunset a smug look on its face. It is quite pleased with all the chaos it has caused in the process of delivering this story. I hope you have enjoyed reading it.)